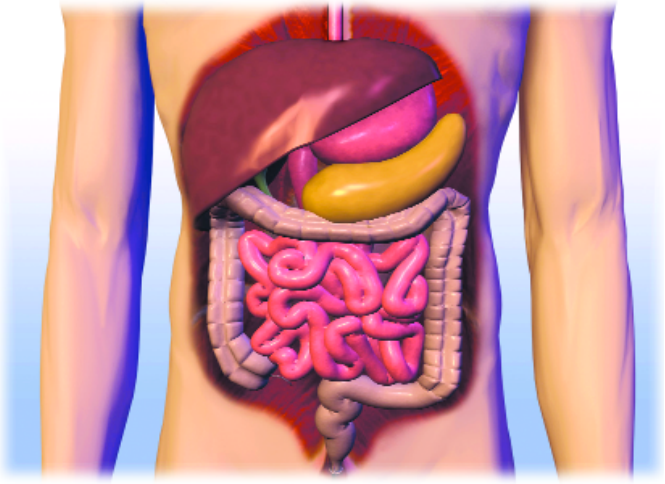
Bowel Battles...



Searching for Answers

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Both prescription and OTC medications for intestinal discomfort are ever expanding. As a people we obviously have digestive problems that go way beyond what we witness when visiting a public bathroom. However, the symptom relief we receive from these drugs does not create lasting comfort.

To understand the disease symptoms of ulcerative colitis, Crohn's, diverticulitis, diarrhea, constipation, irritable bowel syndrome (IBS), gas and cramping, there are several things to consider.

Physical symptoms can turn into a disease, symptoms can be the result of our stress response—chronic or acute—and symptoms can be the expression of something brewing internally. How do we summarize that when addressing our bowels?

DIGGIN' DIGESTION[1]:

To better comprehend the workings and responsibilities of our intestines, let's start at the top. Realize that the entire pipe that runs from our mouth to our anus is officially considered outside the body (this includes our mouth, throat, esophagus, stomach, duodenum, intestines, bowels, rectum and anus). The reason for this is the absence of blood. We don't want to have blood anywhere in our digestive tract, because that would indicate trouble!

Digestion is the process by which the gastro-intestinal system retrieves important nutrients for the body and chemically changes the unused food into waste. Our tract contains different mediums to do that.

In a nutshell: our mouth has saliva and teeth creating *mastication* when we eat. This will turn the food into a liquid mass called *bolus*, which will slide down the esophagus through the esophageal sphincter into our stomach. The stomach releases hydrochloric acid breaking down large food particles into smaller ones and liquefying the bolus into *chyme*. Moving through the pyloric sphincter, chyme enters the duodenum, the first section of the small intestines.

It is here that enzymes released from the pancreas, liver and gallbladder further break down chyme into elements that can be easily absorbed and used by the body. After this run through a primarily acid environment, our food now enters the next part of the small intestines where, through the essential presence of bacteria and yeast, the environment is more alkaline.

The small intestine is lined with a heavily folded inner mucosa, and small finger-like projections called *villi* that enable the digested food and vitamins to be absorbed in the bloodstream. Chyme can travel through about 20 feet or so of small intestine before it enters the large intestine by way of the ileocecal valve. Very little digestion occurs in the large intestine. Undigested chyme that enters here is considered *waste*. This waste becomes more and more solid as it passes through, because water is continuously being reabsorbed from it. Waste collects in the rectum—or end of the large intestine—before the brain signals for it to be expelled from the body.

Now, if you imagine the food that we put in our mouth as a rock, then our teeth break this rock into smaller rocks. These move into the stomach and duodenum where the hydrochloric acid and enzymes turn them into pebbles. In the intestines the bacteria and yeast convert these pebbles into diamonds—the actual *nutrients*—that are then transported through the intestinal wall into the bloodstream. The shavings end up in our bowel movement.

This analogy may be helpful in understanding digestive disorders, because if nutrients don't make it into the bloodstream, we are tired constantly, or we have cramping in our intestines, or we have acid reflux, GERD, hiatal hernia, gas, burping or bloating. We have to wonder—where exactly did it start?

IS IT PHYSICAL?

Let's say that our saliva is not up to par and we don't chew our food well. This will hinder the production of pebbles. And if we don't have enough stomach acid (HCL), it is difficult to make pebbles. Our intestines are not equipped to make diamonds out of rocks, so these rocks can create blockage in the intestines causing constipation. Or they can damage the lining causing Inflammatory Bowel Disease (Crohn's disease and ulcerative colitis). Also, irritation can cause increased pressure in the large intestine, creating pouches that may become inflamed—called diverticulitis[2].

There are also those born with digestive defects[3]. Birth defects of the digestive tract include *esophageal*

atresia (obstruction of the esophagus) and *imperforate anus* (malformations of the anus). These defects may occur together. Most babies born with esophageal atresia also have *tracheo-esophageal fistula*, which means the trachea (windpipe) leading to the lungs is connected to the esophagus. Too much amniotic fluid surrounding the baby during pregnancy may indicate the presence of these defects. Defects such as these are difficult to fix completely, and may cause lifelong struggles.

IS IT FOOD?

But what if this problem is not caused by a lack of chewing or digestive juices, but simply by irritants we put in our mouth? Remember that our digestive tract is outside our body. It is really a second line of defense, the first being what we put in our mouth. More and more people, including very young children, are diagnosed with allergies to wheat/gluten, dairy (especially when pasteurized and homogenized), nuts, or certain sweeteners. The body immediately wants to reject these, often by creating a gag-reflex or stomach cramp. We often see this already with colic in babies. The importance here is to become aware of this and respond by food elimination, letting the digestive system come to rest, and then carefully introducing it again.

Ignoring these symptoms may eventually lead to inflammation of the entire digestive tract, not just the stomach, and it may cause a shutdown creating constipation, diarrhea or chronic cramping.

It is also very well possible that this is an inherited condition, so check with your parents' digestive history or that of your grandparents. Maybe there is colon or stomach cancer in the family, simply caused by inflammation or infection from allergens. Now is the time to stop that cycle!

IS IT MEDICATION?

I can keep this relatively short: Most of you are aware that there are side effects with most of today's prescription medications. I highly recommend you read the warnings for whatever you are taking, if it includes possible stool problems or digestive discomfort. On the other hand, natural medicines such as probiotics, fibers, enzymes, peppermint oil, ginger, garlic, and activated charcoal may be very helpful on your journey towards digestive health.

IS IT EMOTIONAL?

Raise your hand if you have had bowel problems caused by stress.

The intestine is connected to the brain,[4] with signals going back and forth between the two that affect bowel function and symptoms. The nerves can become more active during stress, causing the intestines to be more sensitive and squeeze (contract) more. This is a complicated issue because it often involves hormonal imbalances, misdiagnosed glandular disorders, possible suppressed trauma (incl. PTSD), and medication for mental diseases.

Space doesn't allow me to dig deeper into this, so I encourage you to do more direct research on these connections and/or check out our extensive research library at the store. If you suffer from any bowel issues, I know there are solutions for your discomfort, and I wish you well on your search. ■

1. See **Medical University of South Carolina** at http://www.muschealth.com/video/Default.aspx?cld=15
2. **Diverticulitis:** See http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Diverticulitis
3. **Birth Defects of the Digestive Tract:** See http://www.betterhealth.vic.gov.au/bhcv2/bhcarticles.nsf/pages/Birth_defects_of_the_digestive_tract?open
4. **Irritable Bowel Syndrome:** See http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmedhealth/PMH0001292/

Jacobus is not a doctor and does not intend to diagnose, treat or cure any disorder. The information is based on self-study, interviewing experts on his weekly 3-hour Saturday morning Radio Program *"Gesundheit! With Jacobus," which runs from 8–11 am, on AM 1450-KMMS and AM 1340 KPRK, and on feedback received from retail customers visiting his dietary supplements retail store Gesundheit! Nutrition Center at 2855 N. 19th Avenue, Suite N, in Bozeman (585-4668). If in doubt please visit a professional of your own choice and/or educate yourself with available published materials.