Herbs for Digestive Health

Naturopath, Nutritionist and Herbalist Angela MacRitchie looks at herbs which can aid our digestive health, the subject of her talk on 30th September at CNM (College of Naturopathic Medicine).

The digestive system starts in the mouth and is a tube that runs for nearly 9.0 meters from top to bottom - literally! It is a tunnel that permits the outside world to run throughout the body.

The digestive system is divided into the mouth, the oesophagus, the stomach, the small intestine and the large intestine (also called ‘large bowel’ or ‘colon’) with accessory organs such as the salivary glands, liver, pancreas, and gallbladder. The digestive tract serves to transport, break down foods and provide us with essential nutrients, vitamins and minerals. Finally the waste is carried away from all the cells.

When this system is out of balance it causes a myriad of symptoms and knock-on effects in other areas of the body from our immune system to benefit from their soluble fibre.

These herbs need to be powdered in order to aid in the digestion of fats. A few are: Fennel, Chamomile, Dill, Peppermint, Angelica and Ginger.

These herbs may help prevent as well as reduce flatulence and bloating. They can be beneficial in addressing colic, decreasing muscle spasms and intestinal cramping. Some increase bile flow, therefore aiding in the digestion of fats. A few are: Fennel, Chamomile, Dill, Peppermint, Angelica and Ginger.

Pre Biotic Herbs (Fibre Herbs)

These herbs need to be powdered in order to benefit from their soluble fibre. Fibre keeps the cells in the digestive tract healthy and keeps the digestive tract flowing with soft formed and regular bowel movements. Added to this, the pre biotics fertilize the pro biotics, the substances that feed our healthy bacteria. They include: Dandelion Root, Burdock Root, Chicory Root, Elecampane and Plantain.

Mucllagenous Herbs

This group of herbs creates a healing slime that coats and soothes the gut wall providing lubrication that enables an easier and softer bowel movement. Such herbs include: Marshmallow, Slippery Elm Bark, and Mullein Leaf.

Anti Inflammatory Herbs

Reducing inflammation is vital to gut health and helps reduce the symptoms seen in IBS, IBD, Crohn’s, Ulcerative Colitis and many other gut-related conditions. Useful herbs include Chamomile, Liquorice Root, Frankincense and Turmeric.

Anthroquinine Herbs

Some herbs are very powerful and should only be used with professional advice: Senna, Cascara and Rhubarb.

Herbs can help us with our digestive system as well as their medicinal powers. So what herbs should not be used when pregnant, breast-feeding or on certain medications. See your herbalist for advice. He or she can formulate a mix of herbs consisting of powders, tinctures and teas tailored especially for your particular digestive health and concerns.

A herbalist who has also been trained as a naturopath will additionally help you to identify triggers and causes specific to you, so you can get to the root of your everyday digestive issues. They can then tailor-make a naturopathic plan for you that not only includes herbal medicine, but dietary and lifestyle advice so that you get maximum support for your health goals.

At my talk at CNM Manchester’s Open Day on 30th September, we will be tea tasting many of the digestive herbs so that you can experience first-hand how the herbs taste and make the body feel. See you there!

Purgative or cathartic laxatives cause the bowel to evacuate everything in them and the stool is runny. They are very powerful and should only be used with professional advice: Senna, Cascara and Rhubarb.

Entry fee £10

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