



# 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 the chemicals that control our moods. Not to mention the one hundred trillion bacteria that live there!

Almost all societies have traditionally used herbs for their amazing nutritional benefits as well as their medicinal powers. So what herbs can help us with our digestive system once any medical reasons for discomfort have been discounted?

## Bitter Herbs

Bitter herbs can help to promote digestive secretions and speed up digestion.

An everyday bitter that reduces bloating, gas, symptoms of food allergies and indigestion is Gentian. Other bitter herbs include Barberry Bark, Dandelion Root and Artichoke.

## Carminitive Herbs

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.

## Mucilagenous 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 motion. 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 - Stimulating Laxatives

Chronic constipation is debilitating for thousands of people in the UK, but herbal laxatives should be used with caution. Gentle bulk-forming laxatives include Linseed and Psyllium Husk. They absorb water and provide fibre to the digestive tract. Mild laxatives include Dandelion and Chickweed.



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.

Some 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!

**Open Day  
at CNM Manchester**

**Saturday 30th September,  
10am - 5.30pm**

**Come and be inspired  
by the power of natural therapies  
to promote health and vitality!**

**This event will be packed with fabulous tips  
on how to look after your health naturally.**

**Entry fee £10**

**[www.naturopathy-uk.com](http://www.naturopathy-uk.com)  
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CNM (College of Naturopathic Medicine) is the UK's leading training provider in a range of natural therapies, including Naturopathic Nutrition, Herbal Medicine, Acupuncture, Homeopathy, Naturopathy, Natural Chef and Vegan Natural Chef training. Colleges across the UK and Ireland.