

Everyday Ayurveda

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## Fire Up!

### 13 Ways to Improve Digestion

By Shannon Sexton



It isn't a pleasant scenario: your stomach is upset and it's telling everyone in the room. You can apply your willpower and ignore it for a while (and hope that the people around you do the same), or you can pop a pill for temporary relief, but sooner or later indigestion will take its toll. [More](#)

Why? Because, as ayurvedic expert Robert E. Svoboda explains, "Indigestion is the base of all physical disease, the condition from which all other conditions arise." According to ayurveda, the key to good health is properly functioning *agni*, which in the form of digestive fire helps us assimilate nutrients and get rid of waste, or *ama*. Efficient digestion nourishes and sustains every tissue and organ in our bodies. When *agni* is balanced and strong, we're blessed with:

- Efficient digestion
- Minimal toxic buildup
- Internal warmth
- Energy and vitality
- Clarity of mind
- Courage
- Robust health

But when *agni* is weak, digestion is incomplete and leaves behind toxins, which interfere with the flow of blood, lymph, and energy throughout the body. When we're unable to rid ourselves of these wastes, *ama* accumulates and leads to disease. Warning signs include:

- Inefficient digestion (bloating, gas, constipation, diarrhea)
- Evidence of toxic buildup (coated tongue, unpleasant body odor, excess mucus, and foul-smelling, cloudy urine)
- Internal coldness
- Low energy
- A dull, forgetful, confused, unfocused mind
- Mental/emotional weakness
- Illness

The truth is, most of us could use a digestive tune-up. Here are a few suggestions.

#### Activate Your Solar Power

*Agni's* home is in the solar plexus. By generating heat and strengthening the muscles in this region, we can "fan the fire" and increase our digestive power. Here's how.

#### Get regular aerobic exercise.

Ayurveda's general rule is to exercise daily until sweat forms on the forehead, under the arms, and along the spine.

#### Strengthen your abs.

Do sit-ups, crunches, or leglifts for 5–10 minutes a day.

## **Practice *agni sara*.**

This yogic cleansing practice is the most important exercise for improving digestion and maintaining overall health. (Learn this practice [here](#)).

## **Before You Eat**

### **Do five minutes of diaphragmatic breathing.**

This activates the body's rest-and-digest response, relaxing the nervous system and enhancing blood flow to the digestive organs.

### **Make sure that your right nostril is open.**

According to the yoga tradition, nostril dominance has subtle effects on our energy and can help or hinder our digestion. When the left nostril is dominant (open), our energy is more "yin"—cool, receptive, and passive. When the right nostril is dominant the energy in our body is more "yang"—hot, aggressive, active, and ideal for digestion.

Hint: If your nostril dominance changes from right to left mid-meal, stop eating. This is a subtle signal that your body has had enough. Also, lying on your left side for five minutes after a meal will stimulate digestion, since it helps to keep the right nostril open.

## **The Dos & Don'ts of Eating**

Ayurvedic physicians believe that it's not just what you eat, but how you eat that stokes (or chokes) your digestive fire. Here are six tips for effective eating.

### **DO**

- Follow a balanced, vegetarian, whole-foods diet.
- Eat your largest meal around noon, when agni is the strongest.
- Fast daily for at least 12 hours (e.g., 7 p.m. to 7 a.m.).

### **DON'T**

- Dilute your digestive fire by drinking cold beverages at meals.
- Overwhelm agni by overeating.
- Pollute your system with late-night snacks or junk food.

## **A Belly Massage**

A little tender loving care works wonders on an upset (and previously ignored) stomach. Here's the recipe: warm up some organic sesame oil, find a quiet room, dim the lights, lie down, and slowly rub the oil on your belly in a clockwise motion for up to five minutes.

This will soothe a gaseous stomach, promote digestion, and help you tune into your body and breath.

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