

Digestive Problems

At Napiers we see increasing numbers of patients with digestive problems including:

- Irritable Bowel
- Peptic Ulcers
- Constipation
- Heartburn
- Inflammatory Bowel Disease
- Gallstones
- Indigestion

Many of these conditions can be helped using simple herbal remedies together with diet or lifestyle changes.

Herbal Medicines for Digestive Problems

The old saying "you are what you eat" should really read "you are what you digest and absorb". No matter how good your diet is, if the food you eat is not properly broken down and absorbed, your body will lack the building blocks it needs for the best of health and vitality.

Stress is one of the major factors in many digestive disorders. The release of adrenaline as part of the body's response to stress causes a reduction in blood flow to the digestive organs, which in prolonged stress, can lead to digestive problems. See our leaflet on Stress Management for suggestions on how to deal with stress using relaxation and herbal medicine.

Herbs traditionally used to relieve digestive problems include:

Slippery Elm – a soothing nutritious powdered bark, used to treat any inflammation or irritation of the lining of the digestive tract. Particularly useful for diarrhoea, IBS and heartburn. Best taken as a powder made into a warm drink.

Psyllium – used to tone the bowel and gently ease constipation. Used by herbalists to help IBS, diverticular disease and mild constipation. Combines well with slippery elm powder.

Fennel – helps relieve wind and colicky pain whilst supporting the digestive processes. Combines well with peppermint for use in IBS.

Peppermint – the herb of choice where there is spasm and wind. Also aids the breakdown of fats and increases digestive juices to improve digestion.

Meadowsweet – used by herbalists to reduce excess acidity, meadowsweet also helps to soothe and protect the lining of the digestive tract. Combines well with chamomile and marshmallow root for heartburn and indigestion.

Chamomile – the 'Mother of the Gut', chamomile acts to ease inflammation, reduce spasm, and promote good digestion. Also eases nervous tension and anxiety.

Supplements for Digestive Health

Acidophilus – Helps to maintain a healthy balance of bacteria in the gut

Digestive Enzymes – may help to reduce symptoms of flatulence, abdominal pain and bloating.

L-Glutamine – Used to help support the lining of the digestive tract and useful in the treatment of inflammatory bowel disease and ulcers.

Irritable Bowel Syndrome

IBS is a blanket term for a wide range of common digestive symptoms including abdominal cramping, alternating diarrhoea and constipation, wind and bloating. The most common triggers for IBS are stress, anxiety and food sensitivities. It is important to identify triggers for your symptoms and to avoid them where possible.

Peptic Ulcers

Herbal medicine can offer symptomatic relief while also providing essential support to the digestive system by using herbs such as meadowsweet, chamomile and marshmallow root. We strongly recommend that you consult with a medical herbalist for the most effective treatment of this condition.

Constipation

The bowel is one of the major routes for ridding the body of waste products, and if blocked can contribute to major health problems and a general lack of vitality. Causes of chronic constipation include a low fibre diet, lack of exercise, dehydration, nervous stress and poor muscle tone. Your herbalist can advise on diet and lifestyle, and use herbal medicines to gently improve your bowel function.

Heartburn and Hiatus Hernia

The burning sensation of heartburn can be worsened by smoking, drinking coffee or alcohol, eating fatty, rich foods or by overeating. Herbs such as slippery elm powder and meadowsweet have traditionally been used for these conditions.

Indigestion

Indigestion can be caused by eating too quickly, overeating, stress, hiatus hernia or by a lack of digestive enzymes or stomach acid. Herbal remedies such as meadowsweet and chamomile can provide occasional relief. However, indigestion can be a symptom of more serious disease and should be investigated if persistent.

Inflammatory bowel disease – Crohns and Ulcerative Colitis

Inflammatory bowel disease can be debilitating and difficult to manage, and can have long-term health consequences. Crohns disease and ulcerative colitis can be caused by immune dysregulation, genetic influences and, possibly, infectious agents. Herbal practitioners are qualified to treat such problems and their underlying causes while monitoring your nutritional status and general health.

Diverticular Disease

There is strong evidence that this condition is caused by a low fibre diet and can be greatly improved by increasing the amount of fresh fruits and vegetables, wholegrains and fluid in your diet. Herbal preparations can also help to improve bowel motility, reduce inflammation in the bowel and prevent infection.

Gallstones

Gallstones can cause a great deal of pain and may lead to inflammation and infection of the gallbladder. There is a strong tradition of using herbal medicines to treat this condition, and we recommend you consult with a qualified medical herbalist to formulate your individual treatment plan.

As with all health problems, we strongly recommend that you consult a qualified medical herbalist to create a specific prescription and treatment plan to meet your individual needs.

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