

HEALING HABITS 4

1. What you eat is immensely important, but what you 'absorb' from what you eat is absolutely crucial to health. The digestive process is the cornerstone of physical health and also has the power to undermine emotional and psychological well-being. It seems amazing that chewing is one of the keys to physical and psychological health and yet if we stop and think, chewing is actually the first vital stage in the absorption process. When we chew thoroughly our food can deliver its life-giving properties more readily because the task of the enzymes in the stomach and the colon is made much easier. Inadequate chewing means 'lumps' of food pass into the digestive system not having been acted on by the saliva, consequently the food ferments much more, stirring up toxins in the colon and also transforming alkali forming foods into acid forming foods. The number of times we need to chew what we eat greatly depends on what we are eating but a good guideline is 30-50 chews per mouthful if we are to maximise our absorption. There is an ancient principle which is about 2,500 years old; its message is simple and yet houses the secret of health: 'chew your drinks and drink your food'.
2. Not only do we need to chew thoroughly, but we also need to eat slowly, enabling the digestive enzymes to properly carry out their functions. If we eat too quickly our food sits in the digestive system fermenting and expanding throughout the day, putting stress on the body, and creating the potential for weight gain, fatigue, mood swings and headaches. To reap the full benefit of chewing thoroughly and eating slowly, we also need to sit for a while after eating (10-15 minutes) otherwise accelerating back into action too swiftly causes the body to produce adrenaline which suppresses the digestive processes, which in turn limits the absorption and value of what we have eaten.
3. A perfect digestive system can deal with the combining of foods with no difficulties whatsoever. However, very few people now have a 'perfect' digestive system and therefore we need to be aware of the implications of food combining. The basic principle of food combining is not to mix protein and starch. Until good digestive health is truly achieved it is worth doing something to improve your food combinations. The truth is that if we properly chewed our food the salivary enzymes would break down the fats and convert starch into sugar and proteins would be properly processed in the mouth before entering the stomach. The action of chewing would then send the message to the stomach to secrete, in sufficient quantities, gastric acid and pepsin, allowing the stomach to create the ideal environment for further breakdown and absorption. The signal would then be sent to the other allies in the digestive process (duodenum, pancreas, liver etc.) that they too can carry out their roles. Food combining would not then be an issue if such a regime was rigorously adhered to.
4. The acid alkali balance in the gut is another crucial ingredient for achieving physical health and a greater sense of well-being. Alkali foods do not make the system alkaline nor do acid foods generate acidity, it actually works the opposite way round. In fact, it is better to eat more from the alkaline forming foods such as: fruits, pulses, salads, vegetables and less acid foodstuffs such as dairy products, meat, seafood, nuts and fat. Many health problems are generated from too little acid in the gut which occurs as a result of not eating enough alkaline forming foods. Eczema, food allergies, hepatitis, osteoporosis, stomach cancer,

asthma, diabetes, etc., are all conditions that can occur where the gut is producing too little acid. Acid forming foods do not need to be excluded from our diets (except in a few rare cases); they just need to be treated with more caution and consumed in moderation.

5. So important is chewing that even the wrong foods become less toxic to the system when chewed thoroughly. This is not a cue to incorporate bad foods into our diet, it simply helps us to realise that many health problems can be wiped out by something most of us have control over. When we chew thoroughly food is made alkaline by the action of saliva. The pepsin and hydrochloric acid produced in the stomach as a result of chewing continue to sustain the alkaline status of the food (as long as we do not overeat, as this alters the status of food dramatically). So, even acid-forming foods or foods that overly tax the body can be converted into substances, which do much less harm to the digestive system.
6. The practice of eating substantial meals late at night causes a wide range of problems for the digestion. This is because our body clock is regulated by light and as night closes in the brain begins to produce melatonin to facilitate the sleep cycle. This production of melatonin works in opposition to the digestive enzymes because melatonin is part of the 'winding down' process, whilst the digestive enzymes are part of the 'winding up' process (the activity phase). And so, meals eaten late at night (usually after 8 pm) will tend to sit in the stomach whilst we are asleep, taxing the digestive system, liver and heart, preventing the body from having a truly restful sleep.
7. Whenever we eat beyond our need the excess food is made into acetate fragments (sugars, starches and fats), which through chemical conversion become cholesterol and non-essential fat. Therefore, to overeat is as toxic to the body as not eating enough, because too much cholesterol and non-essential fat harm the body. Cholesterol is vital because it is the precursor of all hormones, but cholesterol in excess can clog the arteries, raise blood pressure, contribute to inflammation etc. Non-essential fat is just that, non-essential, and so fats of this kind stress the body by putting pressure on the heart, the liver, skeletal structure, circulation and other vital organs and processes. Probably worst of all, non-essential fat is a safe haven for toxicity in the body and acts as a slow releasing mechanism for the toxic waste to be distributed throughout the body.
8. Food (in the form of fats, proteins, and carbohydrates) combines with oxygen in the mitochondria (the lungs of the cell) and energy is produced as a result of their combustion. The energy-producing combustion is controlled and regulated by enzymes, which are created from micronutrients (vitamins and minerals) and it is these enzymes that ensure metabolic efficiency. The energy produced from this cellular activity fuels every process and function in the body. So, we can see how important getting the right nutrients is, as well as having an adequate supply of oxygen. If this process is compromised in any way, then physical health is totally undermined. Nothing can work properly in the body if the cell is not performing this most amazing of all its feats (energy production).

9. In the water-soluble systems of the body vitamin C sacrifices itself in the name of maintaining the health and integrity of the body. Its very powerful chemical activity is what enables vitamin C to destroy foreign substances within the water-soluble systems. Omega 3 (one of the key essential fatty acids) appears to have the same function within the oil soluble systems, as it acts as an antioxidant seeking to protect the body's vital functions. We need both our oil and water systems to be protected and in balance as these two systems work in tandem particularly in the area of cellular health. Therefore, it is important to ensure we have enough essential fats, water and vitamin C rich foods to help minimise toxic overload.
10. Essential fatty acids are very good for dealing with cravings, addictions, and a range of negative mood states because of their ability to elevate mood. When mood is elevated then craving, addictions, depression, etc. become less. Mood elevation generated by essential fatty acids occurs because the brain is the fattiest tissue in the body and when it has sufficient fats to keep it 'well oiled' all the functions it manages are enhanced. Essential fatty acids are vital because every cell, tissue and organ needs them to function effectively, so if there are inadequate amounts in the diet all the internal organs and their functions are hindered. Dry skin is the best indicator of essential fatty acid intake. If the skin is dry, it means the body has had to prioritise the essential fatty acids which are available and utilise what is in the system for the vital internal functions (brain, pancreas, liver, adrenal glands etc.). Only when the primary needs are met will the leftover essential fats be diverted to accommodate the skin's needs. When skin is smooth and healthy it means enough essential fats are in the body to meet internal and external needs.
11. We are pleomorphic (there are many 'we's'); this means we all carry a multitude of health and personality possibilities based on our genetic coding. However, because we have a genetic propensity for a particular condition or personality type it does not mean this will be our destiny. It is our interaction with the environment, in all its various forms (people, pollution, diet, social and cultural influences, climate, lifestyle, etc.) that helps shape who we are. Once we understand neither nature nor nurture is solely responsible for who we are, but in fact it is nature plus nurture, we can then begin to appreciate the enormous power base for change that we have. In other words, your genetic potential is activated according to your interaction with the environment. You can change the nature of that interaction and therefore change yourself. You are not set in concrete and so you can alter how your genetic propensity is played out on the stage of your life.
12. Because of the battering our digestive systems have taken as a result of our poor food choices, lack of chewing, pollution and overuse of antibiotics, we now have a situation where our digestive systems are largely inefficient. The internal pollution caused by the bad diet, inadequate mastication and now the super bugs (created as a result of antibiotic abuse) means that our immune system (which was meant to be patrolling our blood and keeping it safe from unwanted intruders) is having to act as a surrogate digestive system. What this means is that the immune system is spending a lot of its time clearing up the toxic waste caused by poor digestion. If we take a look at antibiotic misuse and its consequences, we will see we have now created a situation where candida, staphylococcus, salmonella, e-coli and many more bugs are resistant to antibiotics not only because of over prescribing but also because of their application in the food chain. Antibiotics are used not merely to kill

infection in animals but as growth promoters. This continuous use of antibiotics has enabled the various bugs that threaten human life, to redefine themselves in order to find other ways to survive and eventually evolve into antibiotic resistant strains. But the problem does not end there because both the excess antibiotics and the various super bugs then punch holes into our intestines, which allow toxins and food particles to enter the bloodstream, and this is where the immune system steps in as a next phase in the digestive process as it tries to clear up the rubbish. This altering of the immune system's role is why so many immune system disorders are prevalent in the developed world. Conditions like M.E, Crohn's disease, candida, asthma, virile skin infections, leaky gut, glandular fever, colitis and much more are all implicated in the compromising of our digestive and immune systems. It is time to take action by looking more to nature for the answers to our internal environment.

13. The limbic system (in the brain) is considered the primary interface between the emotions and the body. For example, when we are under stress the limbic system produces electrical and chemical messages causing toxic secretions in the stomach and the colon. The impact of stress, emotions and moods on the biological systems is further evidence of the intertwining of the mind and the body and supports the need to look more closely at alternative and complimentary approaches. Psychoneuroimmunology (the science of how moods affect the nervous and immune systems) has helped us to see the value of looking at those disciplines that improve the mind, such as: positive affirmations, meditation, relaxation, yoga, still-time and a range of natural mood enhancing remedies. Increasingly it is becoming clear that the answers to many of our problems are simple ones: drink plenty of water, learn to breathe and relax, eat balanced meals, and chew what we eat, exercise in measured amounts, stimulate our minds in a variety of ways, develop a positive frame of mind through self-empowering activities and work with nature to maintain health and well being.