Tummy Troubles

Digestive diseases affect nearly 60 to 70 million Americans each year.

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The gastrointestinal tract (GI), or gut, is a long tube that runs through the body from the mouth to the rectum. Along the way are organs such as the esophagus, stomach, small and large intestines, liver, pancreas and gallbladder. In addition, muscles surround the gut, and they are continuously contracting.

Some of the most common illnesses of the GI tract are constipation, diarrhea, acid reflux, gastroesophageal reflux disease, a.k.a. GERD, inflammatory bowel disease, irritable bowel syndrome and celiac disease. All are affected by what and how we eat, and the proper diet is key to treating them.

Some symptoms of digestive disease include bloody stool, changes in bowel habits, severe abdominal pain, unintended weight loss, and heartburn not relieved by antacids.

Another GI condition called leaky gut syndrome is one that digestive health expert Brenda Watson finds particularly troublesome because it triggers the symptoms previously mentioned.

Leaky gut syndrome occurs “when digestion is impaired as the result of poor diet and lifestyle habits,” Watson explains. “The digestive tract becomes inflamed, then other areas of the body begin to suffer.”

Poor diet and lifestyle habits can make the mucosal lining of the small intestine too porous and allow unwanted toxins to enter the bloodstream. “Then an inflammatory condition starts in the body,” Watson says.

Leaky gut syndrome may also begin when the GI tract is aggravated by eating refined carbohydrates and chemical food additives, and swallowing medicines such as non-steroidal anti-inflammatory drugs (for example, acetaminiphen, ibuprofen and aspirin), antacids, steroids and antibiotics, parasites and bacteria from contaminated water, environmental toxins and stress.

Your best bet for treatment? Remove all of the above from your diet and lifestyle.

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