



## The Digestive System

April is here and spring is in full bloom! Gardens are growing, farmers markets are opening, and there will be more colorful, fresh fruits and vegetables to enjoy. Have you ever heard the phrase, "you are what you eat?" Everything in your AMAZING body depends on the food you eat to grow, heal, and rebuild. The food we eat becomes the building blocks for our body.

But food gives us so much more than energy to run, play, think, and grow. Through healthy digestion, your body turns a juicy apple or a delicious sandwich into tiny building blocks your cells can use to heal a scrape on your knee, repair cells that need help, and make the bio-chemicals your organs need to do their jobs.

Have you ever wondered what happens to your food after you take that first bite? Where does it go? How does your body break food down into the tiny molecules it needs to be healthy? The answer is your AMAZING digestive system.

### The Journey of Your Food

Digestion begins before food even reaches your stomach; it starts in your mouth! Chewing is the first and one of the most important steps in digestion, and it's one you can practice. Your teeth break food into small pieces while your saliva begins breaking the food down even more. The more we chew, the easier the rest of digestion becomes.

After you swallow, food travels down a tube called the esophagus and into your stomach. Your stomach is like a strong, muscular bag that mixes your food with special digestive juices, breaking it down into even tinier pieces. This process usually takes a couple of hours.

### The Small Intestine: Where the Magic Happens

After leaving the stomach, food moves into the small intestine. Though it's not actually that small, in fact, it's about 20 feet long in an adult, but is all coiled up and tucked neatly inside your belly! The small intestine is where your body absorbs most of the nutrients you eat. Its walls are lined with millions of tiny, finger-like bumps called villi ("vill-eye"). These villi absorb all the good stuff from your food and send it into your blood so it can travel to every part of your body: your muscles, your bones, your brain, and more.

Your body also gets help from some important organs along the way. Your pancreas and liver send special juices into the small intestine to help break down fats, proteins, and sugars. Your gallbladder stores bile from the liver and releases it to help digest fats. They all work together as an incredible team.

### **The Large Intestine: The Final Stop**

After the small intestine has absorbed the nutrients, what's left moves into the large intestine, also called the colon. Its job is to absorb water and form the leftover material into waste your body doesn't need anymore.

### **Your Gut and Your Brain: Best Friends**

Did you know that your digestive system and your brain are constantly talking to each other? Your gut has its very own network of nerves... so many that scientists sometimes call it the "second brain." Your brain and gut also communicate through a special nerve called the Vagus Nerve, one of the longest nerves in your body. It runs all the way from your brainstem down to your abdomen, carrying messages back and forth between your brain and your digestive organs (AMAZING!).

Have you ever felt "butterflies" in your stomach when you were nervous or excited? That's your brain and gut talking to each other! When your brain feels stress, it sends signals that can change how your stomach and intestines work. And it goes the other way too – when your gut is happy and healthy, it sends signals to your brain that can help you feel calm and well.

Your nervous system (your brain, spinal cord, and all the nerves) is the master communication system for your entire body, including your digestive system. When your spine is moving well and free of stress, those messages travel clearly, like a phone call with perfect signal. A chiropractic adjustment helps your spine move freely and supports clear communication between your brain and body, so your nervous system can do its best job of keeping your digestion, and everything else, running smoothly.

As you enjoy all the wonderful foods of spring like fresh berries, crisp vegetables, and meals shared with the people you love, let's take a moment to appreciate the incredible journey happening inside you. Your digestive system is working around the clock to keep you strong, energized, and growing. Your body is AMAZING! Happy Spring!

**By Mackenzie McNamara, DC**

