



**DIGESTIVE
FITNESS
GUIDE**

Brought to you by

Senokot^{SENOKOT}

The human body...an amazing creation

Human beings are amazing and complex creatures. As well as our emotional and mental grandeur, our body systems are extremely intricate and complicated. Like most living things, our internal systems - such as the digestive system - respond well to being treated with understanding, care and respect. If we do not respect our bodies things can go wrong, and you may require some additional help to bounce back to peak fitness.

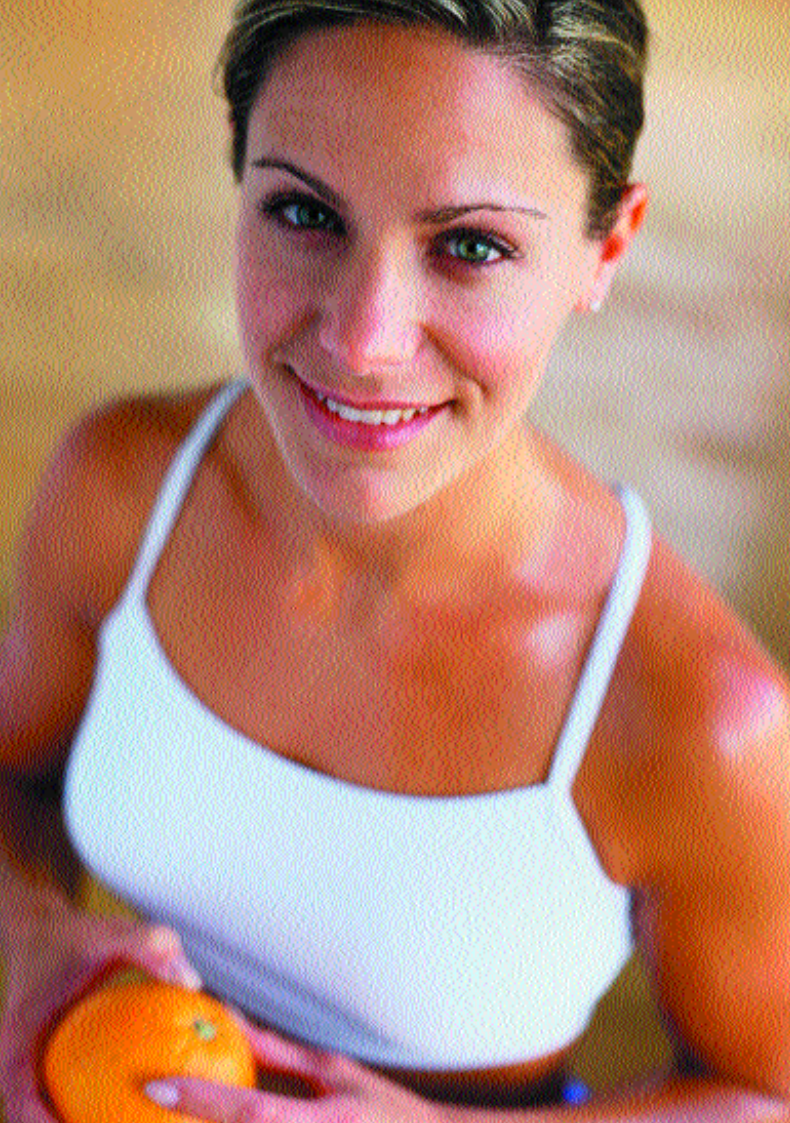
Digestive Health: why is it important?

Without food, water and oxygen we could not survive. Our digestive system transforms the nutrients we eat into substances that can be used by our bodies for energy, growth and repair - the rest is excreted as waste.

Food can move through the digestive system within 24-36 hours. However, it can take approximately 50-60 hours. This is not surprising when you consider that our food travels from our mouth down into our stomach, then around seven meters of small intestine to be broken down and processed. It ends up in the large intestine (paradoxically at one and a half meters long!), more commonly known as the colon or bowel, from where it is excreted.

A fit digestive system is essential to maintain a healthy balance in our bodies – known as homeostasis. If the balance goes out of kilter, there will be noticeable changes in the quality of our physical health. In the case of our digestive system, we may begin to feel bloated, "windy" and lethargic and may experience abdominal pains.

This Digestive Fitness Guide aims to set the record straight – and offer simple, straightforward advice on how to be Digestively Fit!!



TACKLING TABOOS

In order to broach the topic of health and what is a taboo subject, the experts at Senokot conducted a survey into people's attitudes to their health.

When it comes to our health, it seems that we rate some areas of our health as less important than others...

- The digestive system was voted the least important over that of the heart, lungs, kidney and circulatory system

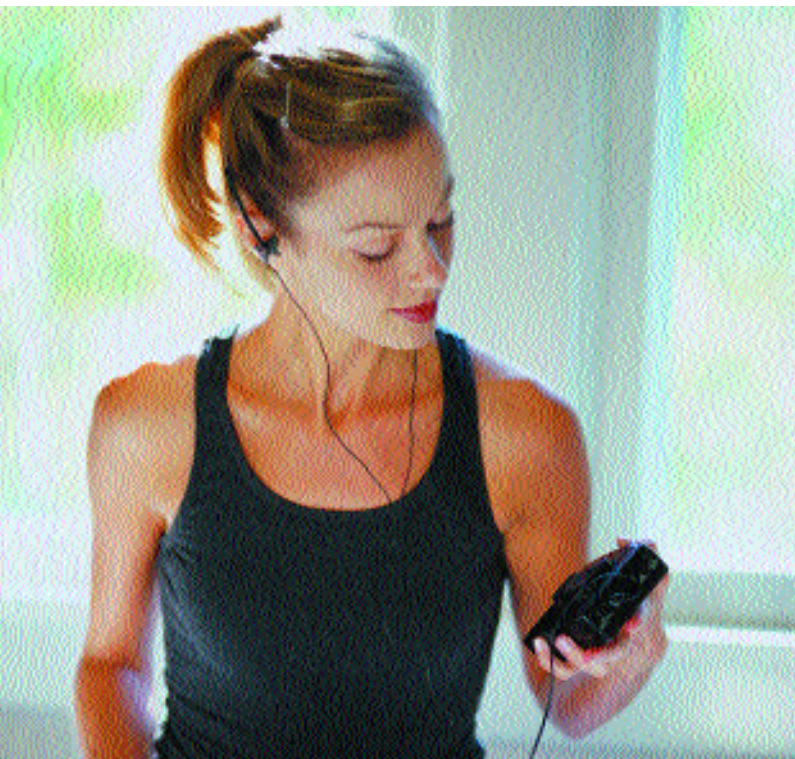
But, we are more comfortable discussing some health issues than others...

- 40% of 25 to 65 year olds said that bowel habits were the least acceptable topic of conversation out of a list of taboo topics - menstrual cycles, bowel habits, contraception, sexually transmitted diseases and body odour

Constipation can affect anyone. Lack of fibre is one of the main causes of constipation. It is recommended that we follow a high-fibre diet by eating at least 18g of dietary fibre a day, but the average diet contains only around 12g. This may be due to a lack of knowledge of the foods we eat, as it appears that few of us are really aware of the nutritional content of foods. Out of the choice of a Weetabix, a bowl of porridge, a slice of wholemeal bread, an orange or a pear, when asked which contains the most fibre...

- 25% of us think that a slice of wholemeal bread contains the most fibre (a slice of wholemeal bread contains approximately 1.7g of fibre)
- Only 2% of those surveyed said correctly that a pear contained the most fibre (a pear contains approximately 2.6g of fibre)

These results highlight the fact that people may not be incorporating enough fibre into their diets.



DID YOU KNOW...?

FACT 1: Constipation can impact on your sex life...

- 25% of all those surveyed stated that being constipated and uncomfortable would put them off sex
- For 25 to 34 year olds, being constipated was rated as the factor most likely to put them off sex, above tiredness, stress, a hangover and a headache

FACT 2: Other factors can contribute to constipation such as ignoring the urge to go to the loo...

- 12% of women would ignore the urge to pass a motion anywhere but their own home fearing that other toilets were not up to their hygiene standards
- One in 10 women and one in 20 men stated embarrassment of going anywhere else other than at home as a reason for stool withholding

FACT 3: Constipation can impact on your quality of life...

- 65% of those surveyed stated discomfort, irritability, fatigue and skin complaints as symptoms they associated with constipation
- One in four women stated irritability as a symptom of constipation

The next chapter of this guide takes an in-depth look at constipation and other digestive disorders.

DIGESTIVE DISORDERS

Considering that the digestive system consists of every process from eating, to getting rid of our waste products, it's hardly surprising that it can be easily affected by our habits and lifestyle. Most of us will probably experience some sort of digestive disorders during our lives. The most common disorders are:

Constipation

Symptoms

Constipation is hard to define as bowel habits differ between individuals, but a person is said to be constipated if they pass hard stools less frequently than whatever is 'normal' for them. Symptoms of constipation also vary between sufferers: some people may just experience difficulty in passing a motion, while others may find they suffer abdominal discomfort.

Causes

Constipation is not a disease as such – although, occasionally, it may be a symptom of an underlying condition.

Constipation does not mean that you are unhealthy or even that you have an unhealthy lifestyle. Some people just seem more susceptible than others to having constipation, although the following can make it more likely:

Not drinking enough fluid – the digestive system needs plenty of fluid to keep things moving. Drinking between 1.5-2 litres a day will keep waste matter moist and enable it to be moved easily through the bowel

Lack of exercise – Our digestive tract is ringed with muscles that contract to help move food through. Like other muscles in our bodies, these muscles need exercise to stimulate them. Exercising regularly will keep the bowel muscles contracting at a healthy rate

Changes in routine and diet – The digestive system is sensitive to even small changes in our daily routine. This is why many of us experience constipation if we lead a hectic lifestyle, or when our diet and routine changes on holiday

Stress – Constipation can be a symptom of stress, but stress can also be caused by constipation

Low-fibre diet – The role of fibre in the diet is to bulk up the stool by taking on water. This makes the stool easier to move through the digestive tract. A lack of fibre in the diet can result in harder, more compact stools, which take longer to pass through the system

Not listening to our body – Ignoring the urge to empty our bowels can lead to a build up of faeces that can block our excretory passage.

Who is more likely to suffer from constipation?

Around half of us will have bowel problems at some time in our lives. However, we are more likely to get constipation if:

Pregnant – Hormonal and physical changes affect the function of the bowel

Menstruating or menopausal – Hormonal and lifestyle changes can cause constipation

Ageing – As we age some of our bodily systems slow down – including the digestive system

Children – Lack of routine and lack of fluids are common causes of constipation in children. Fear of using an unfamiliar toilet (such as at school) can cause children to become self-conscious about their toilet habits and a cycle of stool-withholding can result

In need of medication – Some commonly used medicines eg. the painkiller codeine and some antacids (e.g. aluminium hydroxide), are known to cause constipation

Irritable bowel syndrome (IBS) sufferers – Sufferers often experience constipation, sometimes alternating with diarrhoea.



Irritable bowel syndrome (IBS)

Symptoms

IBS is a disorder of the gut in which the sufferer experiences abdominal pain or discomfort and a change in bowel habit, but there is no obvious cause for this. IBS is called a syndrome because it involves different signs and symptoms, which are all, interrelated. It is thought that women are twice as likely as men to suffer from IBS and it is also more common in emotional and stressed people.

Severity of symptoms varies, but include:

- Abdominal pain – often on the left hand side as this is where the end of the bowel is located
- Alternate bouts of diarrhoea and constipation
- Bloating.

IBS sufferers can also find they:

- Feel anxious and stressed
- Feel nauseous
- Do not feel as hungry
- Need to go to the toilet more often
- Experience pain when they have sex (as the bowel is irritated).

Causes

No exact cause is yet known for irritable bowel syndrome, though it is thought that IBS symptoms occur when the natural rhythmical contraction of the muscles lining the wall of the bowel is disrupted for some reason, such as: stress; a low fibre diet; a high fat diet; intolerance to certain foods. The abdominal swelling/bloating often associated with IBS is caused by a build up of gas, which causes pain and discomfort.





Diarrhoea

Symptoms

- Frequent, loose or liquid stools
- Occasional abdominal pain, which lessens after a stool is passed.

Some people pass frequent, small solid stools with a sense of urgency. This is not true diarrhoea, which is associated with frequent, loose stools.

Causes

- Matter moving through the bowel too quickly can cause diarrhoea, the most common cause is a bacterial infection such as food poisoning
- If we are stressed, hormones released during periods of stress can affect our bowel so that bowel muscles work harder than normal
- People who consume large quantities of alcohol in any one sitting may also experience diarrhoea as alcohol can also irritate the bowel. Rich and spicy foods may also have a similar affect
- Some medicines may also cause diarrhoea such as certain antibiotics and antacids containing magnesium
- Diarrhoea is also a symptom of other disorders such as IBS.

ON THE MOVE AGAIN

Eating your way to digestive fitness

Our digestive system is sensitive to routine, habits and lifestyle. Even those of us who eat what we consider to be a balanced diet could find we have a constipation episode from time to time. However, prevention is always better than cure, so there's no harm in nurturing our body with the food that is going to help it function at its best.

Most nutritionists would agree that all things are acceptable in moderation. It is the balance in a diet that is important. So it is fine to have the odd bar of chocolate or packet of crisps – so long as we are eating good, nutritional food at regular intervals.

Foods your digestive system loves...

Eating a high fibre diet is key to achieving and maintaining digestive fitness. It is recommended that we eat 18g of dietary fibre a day to help this process, but an average diet may only contain only around 12g of dietary fibre. However, incorporating the following foods into your diet will help to increase your fibre intake:

- Wholemeal bread
- Cereals
- Fruit
- Vegetables.



Food	Portion Size	%Total Fibre (NSP)	Insoluble fibre(g)	Soluble Fibre (g)
Bran Cereal	30g bowl	25	6.1	1.4
Wheat Biscuits	2 biscuits (30g)	1	02.	30.7
Cornflakes	30g bowl	1	0.2	0.1
Wholemeal bread	1 slice (30g)	6	1.5	0.3
Potatoes (in skins)	100g	3	1.6	1.4
Peas	50g	4	0.8	1.2
Apples	1 apple (125g)	2	1.7	0.8
Bananas	1 banana (150g)	1	1.0	0.5

General Recommendations

- Dietary Fibre: 18 to 30g per day (MeReC 1999)
- Fluid Intake: 1.5 to 2 litres per day
- Fruit and Vegetables: 5 portions a day.

And those foods not so loved...

It is an unfortunate fact of life that those things we love, tend not to be so good for us! However, there is no need to totally cut out foods high in sugar and fats such as chocolate, just try and cut down on the amount you eat. Here are a few tips:

- Replace some sugary snacks with pieces of fruit or veg
- Eat raw nuts instead of crisps
- Keep processed foods to a minimum, as they are usually high in additives and preservatives.

Drink your way to digestive fitness

Drink, drink, drink... and then drink some more! Consuming up to two litres of fluid a day will give your digestive system the moisture it needs to keep things moving. And you do not just have to drink water: by choosing a variety of fluids throughout the day such as fruit juices and herbal teas, you will help keep yourself hydrated and healthy.

However, drinking too many cups of strong coffee or tea can actually make you lose water as both act as a diuretic, which promotes water elimination from the body. Also steer clear of lots of sugary drinks – your teeth will thank you in the long run!

Get into a routine

The 24-hour society that we now live in often means that our hectic lifestyles get in the way of our health. There just does not seem to be enough time in the day to get everything done. As a result, we often ignore the urge to go to the loo until we have more time or until we get home. Getting into a routine will help your digestive system stay regular and help prevent constipation. Regularity of eating times also play a part in routine so try and eat at roughly the same time each day.

Take plenty of exercise

Not only will regular exercise help keep your digestive system fit, but will also help improve your overall health.

Be kind to yourself

Some digestive disorders such as constipation may be brought on by, or made worse by stress. Finding a leisure activity that focuses on breathing, body control and relaxation will help you to de-stress. Most gyms now offer classes in yoga, pilates and stretching: your local paper or library should be able to point you in the right direction.

Also, when we breathe properly more oxygen is taken into our lungs - and consequently into our blood - to help the process of digestion.

Sometimes, in spite of all good efforts to eat well and create a balanced, healthy lifestyle, your digestive system may need a helping hand to get it back on track.





GETTING THINGS MOVING

In the long-term, diet modification and lifestyle changes may help to prevent the problem re-occurring, but often relief from constipation is needed straight away.

If this is the case, you may want to try one of a range of remedies you can buy over-the-counter from your pharmacist or supermarket.

Constipation remedies

There are four main types of remedies for relieving constipation:

Motility enhancers:

- These stimulate contractions of the muscles in the bowel to reduce the time it takes for waste to travel through the bowel
- They normally work within 8-12 hours.

Examples:

- Senna (Senokot)
- Bisacodyl.

THINGS TO NOTE:

Senna is a natural ingredient that has been used for centuries as a constipation remedy and its efficacy and tolerability are well documented. Senna works only in the colon, which is where constipation occurs. Bisacodyl is an alternative to senna.

SENOKOT

Why Senokot?

Made from the natural senna plant, Senokot provides predictable overnight relief from constipation. The benefits of using Senokot are:

- It works in harmony with the body, gently stimulating the natural process by which food moves through the digestive tract
- It works in a similar way to foods such as prunes and rhubarb, but you may have to eat 12 prunes to get the same effect
- It usually works in 8 to 12 hours. So adults who take it before bedtime, are likely to wake up ready to go the next morning
- It can provide predictable relief. There is no need to worry about wanting to go to the loo suddenly, or your stools becoming too loose so you have a different problem to deal with!

Which form of Senokot is suitable for me?

Senokot is available from your local pharmacy as tablets or syrup.



SENOKOT VARIANT	PACK SIZE	DOSE
Senokot Tablet	20, 60 & 100 tablets	Adults and children over 12 years: 2-4 tablets taken at night Children under 12: Consult your doctor
Senokot Syrup (fruit flavoured)	100ml	Adults and children over 12 years: 2.5ml spoonful taken at night Children 12 and under: Consult your doctor.



Senokot contains natural senna. Always read the label/leaflet

THINGS TO THINK ABOUT

Diabetics – should choose the Senokot Tablets, which have negligible sugar content. Senokot Syrup contains sugar to make it more palatable and is therefore not suitable for diabetics.

Special diets – all Senokot products are gluten-free and suitable for vegetarians. Senokot Syrup is lactose-free.

Older people – unlike some medicines, there is no indication that the dosage of Senokot should be reduced for older people.

Pregnant or breast-feeding – it is important to seek advice from your doctor before using medicines in pregnancy or breastfeeding.





Bulk forming agents:

- Contain natural fibre
- When they are taken with water, they increase the bulk of waste matter in the bowel, making it easier to excrete
- Soften the stools so they are passed more easily.

Examples:

- Isapaghula husk (e.g. Fybogel)
- Bran
- Sterculia.

THINGS TO NOTE:

Ispaghula husk takes effect within 24 hours in the majority of people.

FYBOGEL

Why Fybogel?

Fybogel provides an easy way to increase your daily fibre intake and put yourself back on track.

The benefits of taking Fybogel are:

- It contains a concentrated source of fibre – isphagula husk. One sachet twice daily provides a third of the recommended daily fibre intake, equivalent to about four to five bananas
- It works in natural harmony with your body
- You may find it difficult to take fibre-rich foods, or find it difficult to incorporate enough into your daily diet
- Its soluble formula makes it easy to take for those people who have difficulty swallowing tablets, or who already take a lot of medication
- It is about five times better at absorbing water than bran, resulting in softer stools which are easier to pass
- Your bowel movement should return to normal in a day or two.

Fybogel Orange is available from pharmacies and comes in various pack sizes.



FYBOGEL VARIANT	PACK SIZE	DOSE
Fybogel Orange	Sachets or 34 dose multipack	<p>Adults and children over 12 years may take one sachet/dose in the morning and in the evening</p> <p>Children six to 12: half to one level 5ml spoonful of the granules depending on age, and size, morning and evening.</p>



Always read the label/leaflet

THINGS TO THINK ABOUT:

Diabetics – Fybogel is sweetened with aspartame (a source of phenylalanine) and, therefore, suitable for diabetics

Special diets – Fybogel is gluten and lactose free

Pregnant or breast-feeding – Ispaghula husk is not absorbed by the body, therefore Fybogel may be suitable during pregnancy and while breastfeeding. It is important to seek advice from your doctor before using medicines in pregnancy or breastfeeding

Older people - Unlike with some other medicines, older people do not need to reduce the usual recommended dose of Fybogel.



Osmotic laxatives:

- Promote fluid retention in the bowel
- Keep the waste moist and, therefore, easier to pass.

Examples:

- Magnesium sulphate (Epsom Salts)
- Lactulose or lactitol (synthetic sugars).

THINGS TO NOTE:

Osmotic laxatives may take up to 48 hours to work.

Lubricating agents/faecal softeners:

- Promote water penetration into hard stools making them easier to pass.

Examples:

- Docusate sodium
Always read the label.

FURTHER INFORMATION

Fact sheets and further information on digestive health are available by visiting www.constipationadvice.ie



Fybogel and Senokot are Trademarks