

Soothing Herbs & Gut Repair



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PLEASE READ: *The information in this handout has not been approved by the FDA and does not in any way intend to diagnose or prescribe. Always consult with your health practitioner before taking any remedy.*

Above this, I also recommend that you...

1. *Research an herb in at least three good sources before ingesting it (See my website for great books and links!),*
2. *Listen to your body/intuition to determine if an herb resonates or doesn't resonate with you.*
3. *Take proper steps to ensure that any wildcrafted or cultivated plant is what you think it is, AND*
4. *Check with your pharmacist for herb-drug interactions if you take prescriptions.*

Heartburn, leaky gut, ulcers, gastritis, SIBO, dysbiosis, IBD, and IBS are diverse digestive disorders that plague many Americans. In spite of their range, they share a common approach in herbs and dietary to soothe and bring the body back into balance. We'll explore underlying themes of these conditions as well as the potential benefits of licorice/DGL, marshmallow root, rose petals, cinnamon, ginger, digestive bitters, fermented foods, and probiotics. Learn how to create your own digestive wellness tea based on your individual needs.

Identify & Address the Source of Imbalance

Whenever we deal with a health concern holistically, it's important to try to identify and address the root cause of imbalance. When dealing with digestive complaints, there are some common themes:

- **Poor diet**, which can include...
 - Too much processed food, junk food, refined carbohydrates, excessive meat and bad fats, coffee, alcohol - all these things promote extra wear and tear on the digestive tract and impair its function. Even if your diet is not terrible, it may still not be ideal.
 - A nutrient-deficient diet (which often coincides with the above diet), which starves your body of the base vitamins, minerals, amino acids, good fats, etc. that it needs to properly function and rebuild itself.
 - Eating foods your allergic or sensitive to, which can directly irritate the gut, immune system, and other aspects of wellbeing (skin issues, autoimmune disease, brain fog...). As gut health diminishes, you often develop more and more food sensitivities and allergies. An IgG/IgA food allergy test, while not 100% reliable, can help identify food sensitivities. So can an elimination-rechallenge diet that lasts for at least 1 month before reintroducing potentially problematic foods back in. Keeping a food diary for a few weeks might help you sleuth out problematic foods. Gluten/wheat, dairy, eggs, and soy are common problem foods, but it's really individual.
- **Stress**, which puts you in a "fight or flight" mode and drastically inhibits digestive juices, enzymes, peristalsis, function, detoxification, and repair.
- **Dysbiosis**, which is the proliferation of less ideal or pathogenic microbes and a deficit of beneficial bacteria in the gut. This is aggravated by many things including...
 - Poor diet (see above). Especially a lack of vegetables and high-fiber foods (beans, roots, whole grains, cabbage-family plants, garlic, onions, Jerusalem artichokes...), which help feed good bacteria. If you get a lot of gas, bloating, and diarrhea from these foods, there's a good chance that you have some form of dysbiosis, including possibly small intestine bacterial overgrowth (SIBO) in which the bacteria (good and/or bad) migrate into the small intestine.
 - Antibiotics, which wipe out the good with the bad and provide a great opportunity for pathogenic bacteria and yeasts/fungus to recolonize. This can include antibiotics in your food (meat) and an overly sterile indoor environment. Avoid unnecessary antibiotics and replenish with a quality probiotic supplement and fermented foods.
 - Lack of good bacteria in the diet in the form of fermented foods (especially veggies like kimchi and kraut) and some old-fashioned dirt on your food. Learn more about supporting beneficial bacteria and your microbiome at <http://coopbewell.blogspot.com/2015/04/eating-for-your-microbiome.html>

Often when you begin to focus on gut repair, you'll notice drastic improvements within just a few days or weeks, but the long-term healing could take several months, even a year or longer. As your gut heals, you may find that some foods are no longer problematic.

Helpful Categories of Herbs

Bitters: Bitter-tasting herbs include dandelion leaf and root, burdock root, artichoke leaf, citrus peel, tamarind, grapefruit, gentian root (sustainability concerns), wormwood (safety concerns), and bitter greens like radicchio, endive, and some of the wilder varieties of lettuce. Bitters, taken when we eat, turn on the entire digestive tract. They stimulate saliva, stomach acid production, enzyme production, peristalsis (the wave-like motion that moves food through the GI tract). Indirectly, this encourages healthy elimination and regular bowel movements. Bitters also reduce the glycemic (blood sugar) effect of food, regulate and encourage a healthy appetite, help us feel more satisfied, and reduce cravings (especially for sugar). Most Americans have too little stomach acid (and taking a proton-pump inhibitor just makes this worse), and having too little stomach acid also sets you up for conditions like SIBO and dysbiosis further down the line. If bitters seem to make your digestive issues worse, then focus on the next categories of herbs first. Try bitters again after several months once your gut is in better shape. Don't continually do anything that obviously bothers your system.

Slimers: More formally called demulcent or mucilaginous herbs, these plants often get slimy when they come in contact with water. They help coat the digestive tract, soothing it, creating a temporary protective barrier, and helping to heal damage from reflux, ulcers, gastritis, leaky gut, inflammatory bowel disease, etc. They can be taken as a tea (preferably steeped overnight) or as a powder mixed in food like oatmeal or a smoothie. My favorite slimer is marshmallow root, however slippery elm (sustainability concerns) is also excellent. Licorice root is an *amazing* slimer with additional benefits for gut healing, mucosal lining regeneration, and immune health; however, it can have various long-term side effects. The DGL form of licorice - usually available in chewable tablets - are a "dumbed down" version that is great for GI benefits without the safety risks.

Vulneraries: These are our wound-healing herbs, and you'll often hear of them being used for the skin, yet they're also beneficial for your gut lining. Plantain leaf is my favorite and quite adaptable to tea. Others include calendula flowers, gotu kola, and aloe inner gel (but not the latex, rind, or whole leaf because the bitter inner latex is an irritating stimulant laxative). Drinking bone broth regularly may also help with repair.

Gentle Astringents: Astringent herbs tighten and tone tissues with their varying tannin contents (the same category of compounds used to tan hides to make leather). In the digestive tract, it's a careful balance. We don't want things loose and leaky, but we also don't want the lining as tough as leather or you'll lose the ability to absorb nutrients from food. Some of my favorite *gentle* astringent herbs include rose petals (which also promote good bacteria while discouraging the bad), plantain leaf (also vulnerary and demulcent), dry alder bark (also antimicrobial), and cinnamon (also antimicrobial).

Spices: Spices are pretty dynamic medicinal plants with a wide range of health benefits, often individual to the specific spice. Generally, you can count on them to decrease inflammation, fight pathogens, relax spasms in the GI tract (gas, pain, bloating), and promote good digestion. Some of my favorite gut spices include cinnamon (particularly astringent and antimicrobial, also lowers blood sugar and fights chronic diarrhea), cloves (potently antimicrobial), fennel seeds (great for spasms, gas, and pain), cardamom (antimicrobial, antispasmodic, digestion-enhancing), ginger (antimicrobial yet it promotes good bacteria, stimulates digestion and is warming and anti-inflammatory), and star anise (antimicrobial, antispasmodic). Spices often make up 15 to 50% total of my blends, which also improves the overall flavor with chai-like properties.

Happy Gut Tea

One of my favorite ways to address gut health is to provide a blend of beneficial herbs in the form of tea.

2 teaspoons marshmallow root
1/2 teaspoon licorice (optional)
1/2 teaspoon burdock
1/2 teaspoon plantain leaf
1/2 teaspoon rose petals
1/4 teaspoon fennel seeds
1 thin slice of ginger
(or 1/8 teaspoon dry ginger chips)
2 cardamom pods, lightly crushed
4 clove buds
2 cinnamon sticks
(or 1-2 teaspoons cinnamon chips)

Combine the ingredients in a 32-ounce container such as a mason jar or French press pot. Cover with boiling water and let steep overnight or all day. Strain and drink over the course of the day. It will keep refrigerated for a few days and can be drunk hot or cold.

Adjust ingredients as you like. Once you know how you like it, you can make a two-month supply of dry mix. Simply swap "teaspoon" for "cup" in the recipe, using 1/8 cup cardamom and 1/8 clove. Store the dry mix in a 64 oz storage jar with a tight-fitting lid, and use 2 heaping tbs/pot.

Visit the Links page of www.WintergreenBotanicals.com for Local & Online sources for herb supplies as well as recommended books, informative websites, *my upcoming classes, health consults, and to buy my book!*
