

## Key Nutrients for Optimal Intestinal System Health - by Darlyn Britt

The large intestine (also known as the bowel or colon) stores waste and prepares it to be expelled from the body. While potentially an unpopular discussion topic, the health of this organ is absolutely vital to the health and well-being of the whole body.

Many nutrients and herbs support intestinal health. Today we'll focus on three: aloe vera, fiber and probiotics (friendly microflora).

The succulent aloe vera (*Aloe barbadensis*) plant is widely known as a hardy plant that can thrive in arid climates. The leaves of the aloe vera contain a gel-like liquid that runs out freely after you slice open the leaf. This juice naturally contains many biologically active compounds, including tannins, anthraquinones and resins. Aloe vera juice supports the digestion and absorption of food and nourishes the intestinal system. It may also provide soothing and toning properties to the sensitive tissues lining the gastrointestinal tract. The bowel houses waste and toxins and can easily become irritated, especially in the presence of acidic material. Aloe Vera juice can provide soothing support for these sensitive tissues.

Fiber is essential for colon health. Soluble fiber dissolves in water and forms a gel, which slows digestion and provides a feeling of fullness. Psyllium hulls, the outer shell of the *Plantago ovata* plant, contain more soluble fiber than any natural grain...as much as eight times that of popular oat bran. When mixed with fluids, these hulls swell and exert a gentle pressure on intestinal walls, stimulating them to contract normally and help remove waste from the colon. This added bulk may also absorb bowel toxins, helps keep intestinal walls clear of debris, and helps maintain already-normal cholesterol levels. When taken with a meal, psyllium hulls slow digestion and absorption, so sugars from food enter the bloodstream more gradually. This may help to maintain already-normal balance in blood-sugar levels.

The American Dietetic Association recommends that adults get 20–35 grams of fiber per day for optimal intestinal health and elimination. Most Americans only get 5–14 grams per day—far less than the recommendation. (<http://digestive.niddk.nih.gov/ddiseases/pubs/constipation/>)

Probiotics, or friendly flora, are microscopic creatures that live mainly in the human gastrointestinal tract. The human body is host to literally billions of these “bugs” and to their not-so-friendly counterparts. Their influence on intestinal health is often substantial. Probiotics help the human host in a variety of ways.

- 1) They help support digestion and can improve nutrient absorption so you get more benefit from the food you eat.
- 2) Friendly flora promote immunity, battling unfriendly flora for living space and nutrients in the gut.
- 3) They also greatly support intestinal function. They aid in the elimination of toxins, break down fecal matter and produce certain vitamins as metabolic byproducts.

In short, they can't live without us, and we really need them too! This is called a symbiotic relationship. A natural, delicate balance of microflora in the gut creates harmony.

Supplementing with quality probiotics helps replenish these friendly fighters and is especially recommended after colon cleansing and use of certain medications.

Taking good care of your intestinal system includes a healthful diet of fresh foods and whole grains plus adequate water intake. Key supplements also lend a helping hand.