

What Follows The Swallows Digestion

[Note: This talk begins with a dialog between a woman with a stomachache and her doctor. You can read it taking both of the parts, or you may wish to have a second person join you to help present the dialogue.]



Our talk today is about how to improve your digestion.



“I just feel miserable,” Margaret Mason told her doctor. “I’m tired all the time.”



“I tried drinking extra cups of coffee and more colas to increase my energy,



but then my stomach got so irritated, I didn't enjoy my meals.”



“I bought some antacid medicines at the drug store, but they didn't help.”

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“I tried several small meals a day, but that upset my digestion. I feel bloated all the time. Do you think I have an ulcer?”



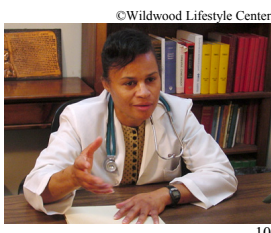
“It's possible, but I doubt it,” her doctor said. “Your symptoms are more likely the result of...



...mistreating your stomach.”



“I suppose you are right,” Margaret reflected. “I'm sure the coffee and colas aren't helping.”

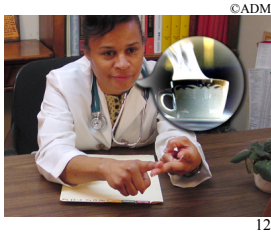


“You are correct about that. So your first step towards getting better is to



...stop taking those stomach irritants.

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“Coffees have aromatic oils that can irritate sensitive stomach linings.”



“Coffee, tea, and many soft drinks also contain caffeine, which stimulates the stomach to produce an excessive amount of acid.”



“The additives found in many beverages are another source of irritants.”



“An even worse problem,” the doctor went on, “is the way so many of us abuse our digestive system.”



“The stomach works best when it receives a meal and has enough time to break it down and digest it properly.”



“After completing digestion it needs some time to rest before the next meal arrives.”

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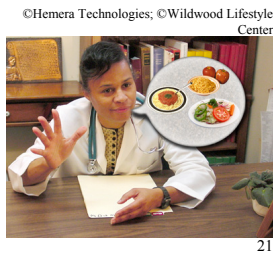
“So often we just keep putting in more food before the previous meal is digested and this really puts an extra load on our poor stomachs!”



“You make it sound as though we shouldn't eat snacks at all!” Margaret exclaimed. “These days everybody snacks!”



“True, and nearly everybody has problems with indigestion, heartburn, irritability, insomnia, mental dullness, and weight gain.”



“A pattern of three meals a day - with no snacking in between - could solve many of these problems. For the best of health meals should be spaced at least five hours apart.”



Margaret shrugged. “OK; that makes sense. I'll give it a try. I sure don't have anything to lose.”



“It won't be easy,” her doctor cautioned. “But if you stick to this program, I guarantee you will feel much better. Drink lots of water between meals and let me know how you feel in two weeks.”

[END OF DIALOGUE]

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Food is one of the special pleasures of life. We know that God wanted us to enjoy our food,



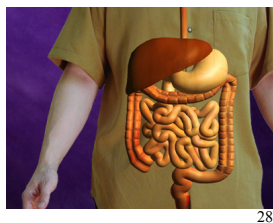
...because He created us with taste buds to appreciate its flavor. He placed nearly 9,000 of them on the human tongue!



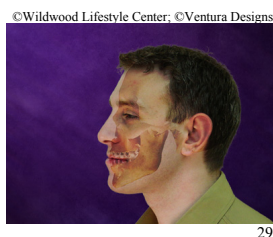
But while we enjoy the taste of food in our mouths,



...how many of us ever think about what happens to that food once we swallow it?

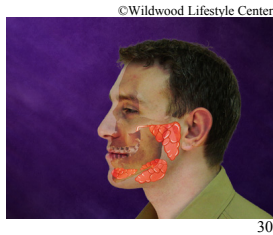


Digestion is the process by which the body breaks down food into its components. This work is done primarily by enzymes, which act like scissors, cutting large nutrients into small bits. In this way, carbohydrates may be broken down into glucose, fats into fatty acids, and proteins become amino acids. The blood can pick up these smaller substances from the intestines and carry them throughout the body.

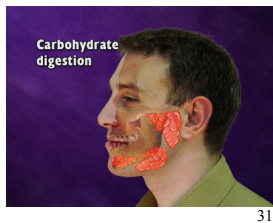


Digestion actually begins in our mouth, while we are chewing...

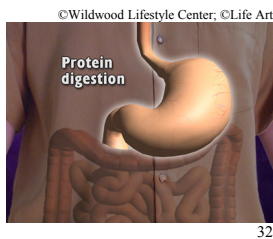
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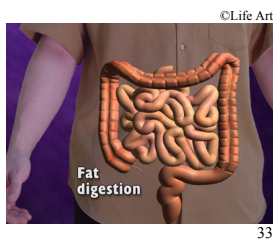
...and mixing the food with saliva from our salivary glands.



Carbohydrates, for example, start getting broken down in the mouth and this process continues in the small intestine.



Protein digestion, however, begins in the stomach and continues in the intestines.



Fat is digested only in the intestines.



The stomach has a very important role in digestion. It has three basic functions:



It **breaks food down** into smaller particles by churning and mixing it.

It brings food to the needed consistency by either adding or **absorbing fluid**.

It **secretes acid**, which enables the food to be digested.

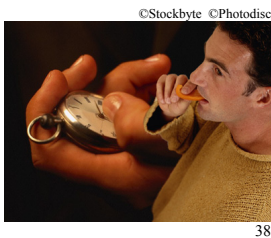
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After leaving the stomach, the food goes into the intestine where digestion continues. Digestive juices produced by the liver and pancreas really help in this process. Finally, any leftover food residue is channeled through the large intestine and discarded as waste.



We can see from this that the body has a very orderly way of handling food. However, many things we do upset this and cause great distress to our bodies.



One of our worst habits relates to the time we eat. It's not just what we eat that matters, but also **when** we eat. The digestive machinery works best when it is given time to digest one meal, and rest a bit, before the next meal comes along.

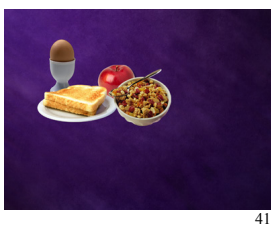


The following study illustrates this well:

A group of students at a large university received a breakfast of cereal, toast, fruit, and an egg.

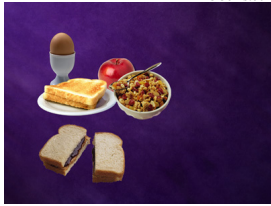


After four hours, special tests showed that their stomachs were empty.



A few days later these students ate the same breakfast,

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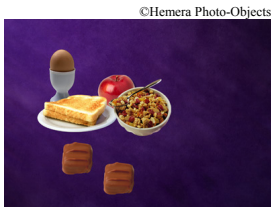
but two hours after eating they were given either a peanut butter sandwich...



...or a piece of pumpkin pie with a glass of milk.



Six to nine hours later part of their breakfast was still in their stomachs!



One person received a little chocolate candy twice in the morning...

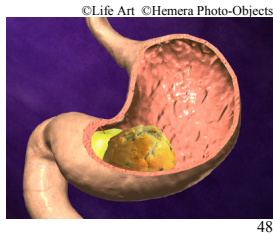


...and twice in the afternoon.

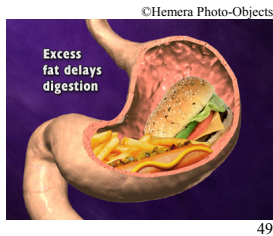


Some **13 hours later** more than half the breakfast was still in the stomach--still undigested.

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When we add more food to the stomach before it has finished digesting the previous meal, the digestive process slows down until the stomach can process the new food. So this is why, if we eat too often, our stomachs may keep working all day and sometimes long into the night.



Eating a meal high in fat also slows down digestion. Fat, when in large amounts, covers the food in the stomach and makes it greasy. This prevents many enzymes from working properly. As a result, the fat has to be dissolved and the acid neutralized by the intestinal juices (much as the grease on your hands cannot be removed until it is dissolved with soap and hot water).



If the amount of fat in a meal is not large, it will make little difference in digestion time **but** a typical **western** meal, because of its **high fat** content,



may need 5 to 6 hours, or longer, to pass through the stomach.



Eating snacks between meals also disrupts the orderly digestive processes and stresses the stomach. Just as any machine kept constantly at work wears out faster, eating too frequently can cause the stomach to become weakened and show signs of distress.



Drinking water **with** meals also slows down digestion. It is much better to drink plenty of water between meals.

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Drink water at least 30 minutes before a meal and wait 2 hours after a meal before drinking water again. This will keep you well hydrated and protect you against the hungry feeling that sometimes comes between meals.

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What about eating a large variety of foods at one meal?

Too many different kinds of food at one meal may cause indigestion. The body can handle three or four kinds of foods at one meal, with maximum efficiency and minimum stress. Big meals take longer to digest and often leave us feeling tired and sleepy.

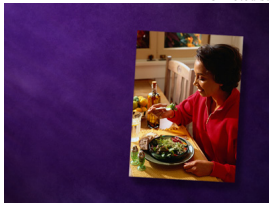
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What happened to Margaret? Did her health improve as a result of making these simple changes? She was radiant when she went back to her doctor! “After three days my appetite came back and my stomach problems disappeared. What a simple solution! I've been telling all my friends.”

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The bottom line: A pattern of three meals a day, with no snacking, could solve many of the problems of...

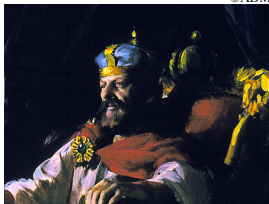
- Indigestion
- Heartburn
- Irritability
- Insomnia
- Dullness
- Weight gain



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...indigestion, heartburn, irritability, insomnia, mental dullness, and weight gain that are plaguing so many people today.

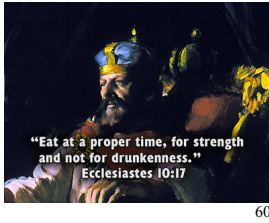
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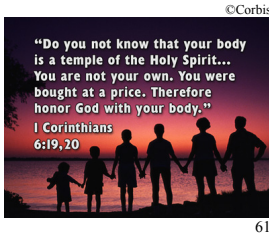
Even king Solomon knew about these principles. He admonishes us to--

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“Eat at a proper time--for strength and not for drunkenness.”
(Ecclesiastes 10:17)

In the New Testament, the apostle Paul reminds us of our responsibility to God for our health.



“Do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit... You are not your own. You were bought at a price. Therefore honor God with your body.” 1 Corinthians 6:19,20 (NIV)
