



Preventing Common GI Issues with Diet

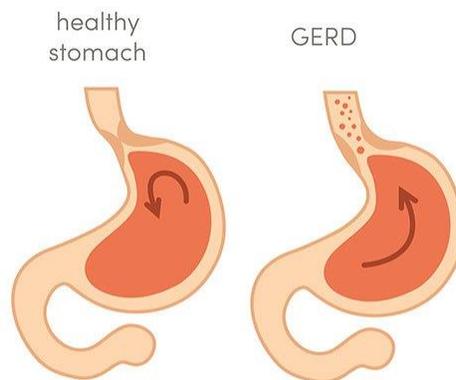
Acid Reflux

Gastro-esophageal reflux disease (GERD) is one of the most common digestive issues. The two most typical symptoms are heartburn and a sour taste in your mouth. Millions of people take some form of prescription or over the counter medication, and a lot of money is spent in emergency room visits or hospitalization because of this condition.

Chronic heartburn, or GERD, can result in serious problems including esophagitis, Barrett's esophagus, strictures, and esophageal or stomach cancer.

To prevent all these complications, we have to try to prevent the acid reflux. There are certain lifestyle factors that may contribute to poor digestion and increased inflammation. Skipping meals or having long gaps between meals, eating large meals, eating too fast, high fat meals, and foods that are highly processed and full of sugar and sodium are all known to cause acid reflux.

Prevent reflux by eating small balanced meals at regular intervals, chew your food well and increase fiber rich foods. Avoid soda and other sugary beverages and make sure to drink water throughout the day.



GASTROESOPHAGEAL REFLUX

Constipation

Constipation is common in adults and children and probably represents the most common intestinal complaint. Chronic constipation increases risk of diverticulosis and colon polyps and colon cancer.

Constipation is defined as:

- Less than three bowel movements per week
- Straining more than 25% of the time
- Hard stools more than 25% of the time
- Incomplete evacuation more than 25% of the time

Constipation is often due to either one or a combination of these three factors: low fiber diet; poor water intake; or lack of physical activity or exercise. All of these are important for intestinal health and normal bowel function. Healthy dietary choices are the foundation of intestinal health and bowel function; what goes in affects how it is eliminated.

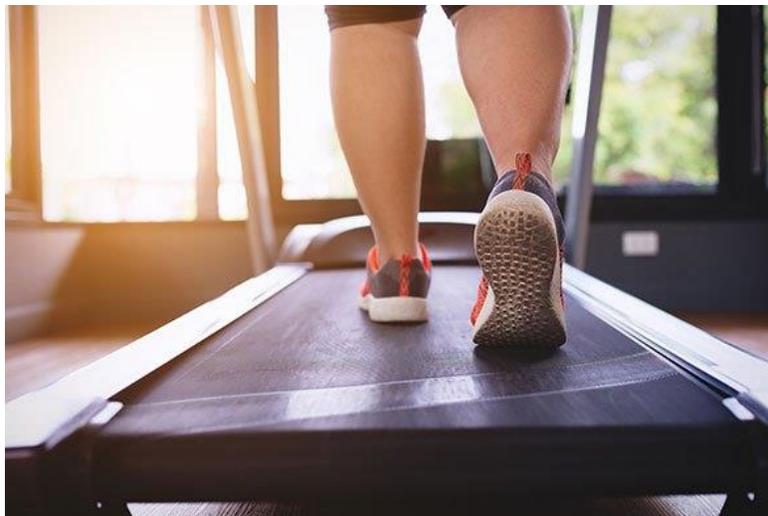
Diverticulitis

Diverticula are pockets that form on the surface of the large intestine. The condition of having these pockets is known as [Diverticulosis](#). When these pockets become infected, the condition is known as Diverticulitis. It is a painful condition and often requires hospitalization and treatment with medication and/or surgery and complete bowel rest which may include liquid diets or in severe cases, temporary feeding tube.

Prevention is always better than cure! The most common cause for developing diverticulosis is a diet that is lacking in dietary fiber. Processed packaged foods and fast foods do not have any fiber. For preventing diverticulosis, eat a diet rich in fiber including oatmeal, plenty of fruits and vegetables, whole grains, beans, nuts and seeds.

It is a misconception that certain foods need to be avoided with diverticulosis.

The only time to limit fiber is during a flare up when the condition warrants a low fiber diet to help heal the infection and inflammation.



4 Ways to Improve Gut Health

#1 – Choose unprocessed foods.

For good digestive health and overall health and wellness, it's important to select unprocessed foods. Eat a diet full of fiber rich foods such as whole grains, beans, and a variety of vegetables and fruits. In short, eat real food and help support healthy bacteria in your gut.

#2 – Drink more water.

Drink 6 to 8 glasses of water per day; avoid beverages with sugar and artificial chemicals.

#3 – Get regular exercise.

Regular exercise – as simple as brisk walking for 30 minutes per day – will likely improve bowel function.

#4 – Make healthier choices.

It is important to note that fiber supplements are not a substitute for poor dietary habits. Limit processed packaged food, fried or fatty foods and limit red meats.

About Parul Kharod, MS, RD, LDN

Parul is a Clinical Dietitian in Outpatient Nutrition Services at [WakeMed Cary Hospital](#). For information related to diet and nutrition, or to speak to one of our licensed, registered dietitians, [contact Outpatient Nutrition Services today](#). Insurance coverage and costs may vary.