

## Make Sense of Digestive Health

Cindy Kubica

(560 words)

For Christmas my granddaughter, Sara gave me some wonderful lotion called Warm Vanilla from Bath and Body Works. I was at the airport standing in line to get on the plane when the man behind me began sniffing me—not a short sniff; he took a big, long whiff of me. At first I thought I was imagining it, but after the third time I got upset and turned around and looked him square in the eyes. A big ole’ ear-to-ear country boy grin spread across this face as he said, “*You smell like mamma’s cookin’.*”

Our sense of smell is powerful and can trigger memories and emotions—plus it’s a strong attractor-factor. That good ole’ boy kept turnin’ and a winkin’ the whole flight.

Our sense of smell also triggers hunger, but did you know it’s considered to be part of the digestive system? All of our senses are. A sizzling steak not only smells amazing but also sounds yummy as we watch it turn a scrumptious golden brown. Our mouth begins to water and the moment we take a bite our taste buds are in bliss. (If you’re a vegetarian, who knows, you may have this reaction to fried tofu.)

Your senses help *wet your whistle* which is actually part of the digestive process. Saliva contains enzymes that aid in breaking down food and moistening it so it can slide easily through the digestive system.

With today’s grab n’ go breakfast, McLunches, and ‘unwrap and zap’ dinners, our senses hardly have time to work. The stress of racing through life doesn’t allow for proper digestion. When in the fight-or-flight mode, the digestive system actually shuts down to conserve energy. But people still manage to force down food—which is why they have digestive issues and antacids continue to be a multi-billion dollar business. Eating while stressed can cause more than indigestion and an acidic stomach, it can create an array of health issues including:

nutritional deficiencies, constipation, diarrhea, diverticulitis, Irritable Bowel Syndrome (IBS - very painful) or even Leaky Gut Syndrome.

Your life may not slow down so what can you do?

1. When eating, take your mind off work or your stressors and become completely conscious of the eating experience.
2. Before the meal arrives, take three deep, diaphragmatic breaths.
3. Relax your muscles by allowing your jaw, shoulders, and arms to go limp for 20 seconds; then relax your chest, abdomen and legs.
4. Take time to give thanks for the food. Thank your higher power, and/or the people who raised, grew, or prepared it; to the animals, plants or the Earth; to your body for receiving it.
5. When the food arrives, don't attack it—smell it. Think about my country-boy sniffer and take in the aroma.
6. Eat slowly, chew thoroughly, and let your taste buds party.
7. Choose nutritious foods. Yes, our nutrients should come from food not a pill. Remember, they are called supplements not replacements.
8. Fast food doesn't always have a drive-thru window. Fast food is also food *you* prepare yourself ahead of time.
9. Fruit, vegetables, pre-made salads, and even a hardboiled egg are fast foods.
10. If you are having a particularly stressful day—eat light. Your stomach will thank you.

Be kind to your stomach, and it will be kind to you.

Cindy Kubica is a stress expert and whole health educator from Franklin, Tennessee. She presents to audiences across the country and internationally on how to move beyond stress management to energy management. Cindy is an author of six books and is co-owner of a commercial photography studio in the Nashville area.

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