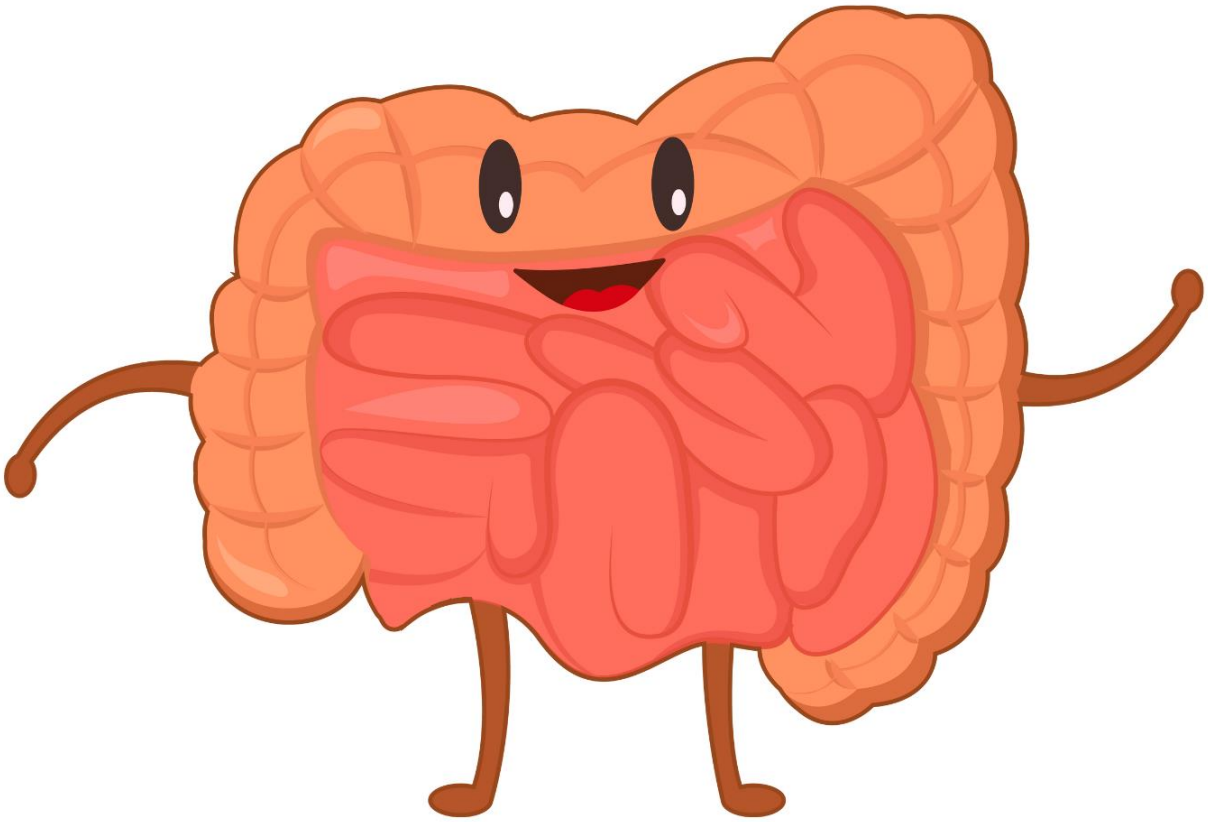
MORE THAN DIET

WAYS TO SUPPORT YOUR DIGESTION FOR OPTIMAL HEALTH



Fiona Lovett

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MANUAL THERAPY FOR GUT WELLNESS

DISCLAIMER

Please be aware that this E-book is for educational purposes and that the information presented is for general knowledge only.

It is highly advised that if you are experiencing any digestive issues or discomforts you should consult your doctor so that you may receive the appropriate assessment, investigations and treatment relevant for you.

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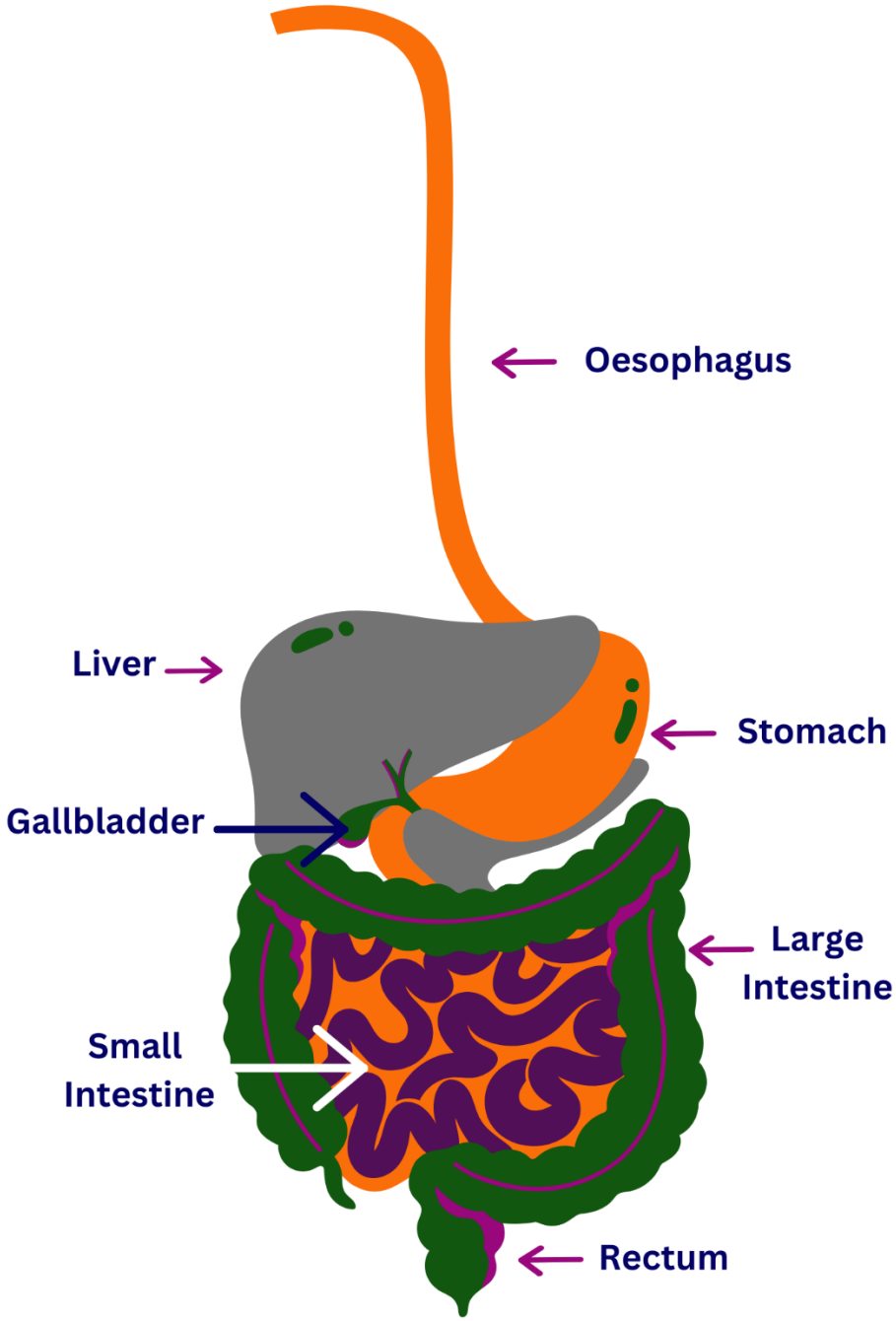
THE DIGESIVE TRACT



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HEALTHY POOP

Talking about poop may not be quite the subject for the dinner table, however when it comes to the health of our digestive system, the appearance of our poop can tell us a lot.

Healthy poop should be a medium to dark brown colour and have a firm but soft consistency that is easy to pass. It should ideally be shaped like a log or a sausage, with smooth edges and a uniform texture. It should also be without visible signs of undigested food or mucus in the stool, and it should not have a foul odour. Additionally, healthy poop should be passed without discomfort or pain and bowel movements should occur regularly without excessive strain or urgency. These signs of healthy poop indicate that your digestive system is functioning properly.

On the other hand, unhealthy poop signs can include changes in colour, consistency and odour. For example, if your poop is consistently green or yellow, this could be a sign that your body is not properly digesting food. Similarly, if your poop is hard and difficult to pass, this may indicate dehydration or an inadequate fiber intake. While foul-smelling poop can be due to foods you have eaten or medicines you are taking it can also potentially be a red flag for digestive issues, such as an infection or inflammation in the gut. It is important to pay attention to these signs and make adjustments to your diet and lifestyle accordingly and to always seek medical attention if any issues are not resolving.

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HOW OFTEN SHOULD YOU POOP

It is important to have regular bowel movements to maintain good digestive health.

The frequency of bowel movements is completely unique to you and varies from person to person. Ideally, it would be good to have a bowel movement once a day, however some people may have bowel movements less frequently. This is absolutely fine if you are not experiencing any discomfort or other digestive symptoms, you are not having difficulty passing stool and this has always been your 'regular'. Some of you may also have multiple bowel movements a day which is also fine again as long as you do not have other digestive symptoms and don't experience diarrhoea and urgency and that you are not going multiple times because you don't feel fully emptied – this would be constipation.

From a medical perspective having bowel movements less than 3 times per week is usually considered constipation. If you are going less than usual for you personally then this may also be due to constipation.

Some factors that may affect bowel movement frequency include diet, hydration, exercise and medication use. Again, if you experience changes in bowel movement frequency or have other digestive symptoms that are not resolving it is recommended to speak with your healthcare provider.

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WHEN TO SEE YOUR DOCTOR

Red flags are signs and symptoms that indicate either an acute emergency that requires an immediate visit to the emergency department or a prompt visit ASAP to your doctor.

When you should promptly visit to your doctor:

- Blood in the stool or black tarry stool (known as melaena)
- Significant and unexplained changes in bowel habits that are not resolving in more than a week
- Unintentional & unexplained weight loss
- Unexplained loss of appetite and feeling full quickly
- Having night time diarrhoea that isn't gastroenteritis
- Persistent difficulty swallowing or painful swallowing
- A lot of mouth ulcers in addition to digestive issues
- Regular abdominal pain
- Frequent and severe heartburn
- Constant nausea or vomiting
- Vomit with blood
- Having symptoms and have a family history of digestive issues or disease

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Red flags that require immediate medical attention:

- Severe abdominal pain that isn't resolving, especially if you are unable to pass stool or wind, are nauseous or vomiting, or have a fever
- The pain is getting worse or lasted several or more hours
- The pain wakes you from sleep
- The pain is spreading to your neck, chest or shoulders
- You have difficulty swallowing

It is important that if you have digestive symptoms that are not resolving, especially if they are new for you, you should always see your doctor to rule out any underlying cause or issue.

Doing this allows you to engage in the best management plan for your condition or symptoms going forward. If there is an underlying issue causing your symptoms, addressing that particular issue may resolve your digestive symptoms.

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POOPING TIPS

Take Toilet Advice from Asia

Have you ever travelled to Asia and found yourself having to use a toilet without a seat and adopt a squat position instead. Well, this is purported to be the most natural and easiest way to have a bowel motion and the fact that western countries have more issues like diverticulitis is probably a tell-tale sign.

This is because when we squat, we change the position of what is known as the anorectal angle of the pelvic floor, which helps to open our bowels. Basically, you are straightening the pipe that your stool is flowing from!

Western toilets don't allow for this. It may be helpful, if you are plagued by constipation, to either invest in a 'poop stool' or use something to prop up your feet that allows you sit in a more squat-like position where your hips are flexed.

You should also lean forward slightly. This will create a natural curve in your lower back and help put pressure on your bowels. Some homemade ideas if you don't have a stool handy could be a pile of books or magazines, yoga blocks, rolled up towels or bolster. Everyone's leg height and toilet height are different so experiment to see what works for you.

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Don’t Strain

While it can be frustrating to experience constipation, resist the urge to strain. Straining puts pressure on the rectum, anal canal and sphincter, and pelvic floor. If straining becomes a constant habit it may lead to issues like diverticular disease, haemorroids, tortuous colon (twisted and elongated), anal fissues, weakened pelvic floor and even prolapse of the pelvic organs.

Instead of straining do some deep breathing prior to your bowel movement and adopt a good position on the toilet. Additionally, to help in avoiding long term complications, it's important to listen to your body. When you feel the urge to have a bowel movement, don't delay.

Don’t hold on

It is important to listen to your body's signals and make time to use the restroom. Holding on to your bowel movement for too long can cause constipation or make constipation worse, with stool potentially becoming hard and dry from sitting too long in the colon. This may lead to painful bowel movements and other health problems.

Additionally, ignoring the urge to use the restroom can cause the muscles of the rectum and anus to weaken over time. It also desensitises the nerves that control the sphincters which means your body may stop sending urge signals. These things can lead to issues with incontinence or difficulty controlling bowel

movements. It's important to establish a regular bathroom routine and not be afraid to excuse yourself when you need to use the restroom.

*Adopting a squat like position on the toilet may be helpful if you are constipated or straining to pass stool

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DIGESTIVE TIPS

Eat slowly and chew your food thoroughly

Do you often feel time poor and resorting to multi-tasking while you eat, not being present and then wolfing down your food without chewing properly? This is common for most of us these days due to feeling the overwhelm of busyness. However, this is not good for our digestion and we should allow ourselves the time to have our meals so our digestive system can work optimally and benefit our health.

Ideally, we should be aiming to chew our food around 30 times. This can be less for softer foods and sometimes more for quite dense foods.

Chewing food well allows enzymes in the mouth to begin breaking down food before it enters the stomach and helps our gastrointestinal (GI) tract prepare for digestion.

Not chewing food well can result in indigestion and also prevent food being broken down properly which can lessen the absorption of nutrients. It can also lead to overeating as when we eat mindlessly we often miss the signal from our brain that we are full.

If you are prone to reflux, bloating, loose bowels or even constipation you will most likely benefit from paying more

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attention to how well you chew your food and take more time with your meals.

Don't overeat and listen to your satiety signals

Overeating can result in indigestion, bloating, nausea and just general digestive discomfort. It can also contribute to weight gain and issues associated with this.

Often overeating occurs when you are not really paying attention to what you're eating, are distracted, eating while you are rushed and not chewing your food properly.

To avoid overeating it is vital to listen to your body's satiety signals. These signals alert you to when you are feeling full. It is important to understand that the feeling of fullness can take about 20 minutes after having eaten to actually register.

Some things to consider to prevent overeating are:

- Not wating until you are ravenous to eat
- Taking your time and paying attention to what you are eating
- Keeping hydrated as thirst signals can often be mistaken for hunger signals

Leave good time between each meal including snacks

The migrating motor complex (MMC) is a pattern of contractions that occurs in the GI tract during periods of fasting, when we are not eating. It has 4 phases and helps to sweep undigested material from the stomach and intestines, preventing harmful bacteria from colonising these areas.

Leaving time between meals is important for the MMC to function properly. The moment we start eating again this process comes to a halt, and will start from phase one again after we finish our food.

Eating frequently or snacking too often throughout the day can disrupt the MMC, leading to incomplete digestion and potentially digestive issues. It is often recommended to wait at least 3-4 hours between meals to allow the MMC to complete its cycle and maintain healthy gut function. This can be particularly helpful if you are trying to manage small intestinal bacterial overgrowth (SIBO).

By giving your body the time it needs to properly digest and eliminate waste, you can help prevent digestive discomfort and improve overall well-being.

EXERCISE & DIGESTION

Exercise is not only beneficial for maintaining a healthy weight and boosting cardiovascular health, but it can also aid in digestion.

Physical activity helps to stimulate the muscles in the digestive tract, helping move food through the system more efficiently. This action is known as peristalsis. Regular exercise helps to improve bowel regularity which may aid in the prevention of conditions like diverticulitis and haemorrhoids.

Exercise can also help reduce stress, which is known to aggravate digestive issues you may have. Incorporating physical activity into your daily routine, even a brisk walk after meals, can have positive effects on your digestive system.

On the other hand extreme or more intense exercise for some people may aggravate digestion. This may be due to physical stress placed upon the body and the nervous system interpreting it as a threat. Not everyone is the same and high intensity exercise or running marathons may not suit everyone. Be kind to yourself and find what exercise best suits you and listen to your body. There may be days where more intense exercise is fine and other days where you may benefit from something gentler and that is ok. Find the balance, especially if you feel exercise is something your digestion is sensitive to.

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MASSAGE FOR DIGESTION

People have been using abdominal massage to aid digestion for centuries. Some of the most known are probably Thai Abdominal Massage known as Chi Nei Tsang, and Mayan Massage. Mayan massage is probably known more as fertility massage but is also used to aid digestive issues.

And then of course there is Visceral Osteopathy or Visceral Manipulation which utilises techniques to help improve the function of the viscera or internal organs. In my practice the clinical focus is on digestive issues, visceral hypersensitivity (increased sensitivity to pain and discomfort of the viscera) and stress.

The idea around treating the abdomen with manual therapy is to address tissue tension, induce relaxation to encourage a better vagus response which is important for optimum digestion, to improve motility and peristalsis, and to improve blood and lymph flow.

It really is no different from having a massage or osteopathic treatment when you have joint or muscle aches and pains. Having a holistic approach of diet, exercise, stress management, good habits and manual therapy can be a good way to manage the complexity of the digestive system. Sometimes just addressing diet is not enough and oftentimes it may not be the underlying problem at all.

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In addition to having treatment with me in my clinic, you can try doing your own self-abdominal massage at home.

You can check out my website and social media for videos for some self-massage techniques. Please make sure you read the contraindications as they are not always suitable for everyone.

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ABOUT ME

I'm Fiona and I am an osteopath that has an interest in helping people who experience digestive and abdominal discomfort using visceral osteopathy and abdominal massage techniques.

My journey started 15 years ago in the UK where my passion for the gut was sparked when I was first learning massage. I really loved learning how to massage the abdomen and was a little disappointed that we spent so little time on treatment of that area which led me to enrol in a short course on abdominal massage not long after I graduated.

It was during this course that I was introduced to the gut-brain axis connection and the effect of emotions and mood disorders on gut function and health. This made perfect sense to me as when I was in my first couple of years of primary school, I had a daily dose of what you would call 'nervous tummy' and my gut continued throughout my life to be sensitive to stress.

Later when I studied osteopathy, I learnt about treating the viscera with visceral osteopathic techniques. Viscera means organs, and visceral osteopathy is treatment that focuses on restoring balance and equilibrium to the organs of the body and their associated tissue structures. I also took a course in Chi Nei Tsang when I was travelling through Thailand.

Currently I work out of clinics in both Chatswood and McMahon's Point in Sydney, Australia.

I am also currently working on an online course to teach people how to treat themselves at home, wherever they are in the world. So, if you or anyone you know are interested make sure you have given me your email or follow me on social media to be the first to know when it is available.

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For more details about my services, more tips or to book an appointment, visit my website www.topazhealth.au or follow me on social media at:

Instagram: @topazhealthsydney

Facebook: facebook.com/topazhealthsydney

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