



## **A Four Step Approach to Better Nutrient Absorption**

We have all heard the quote “You are what you eat” but many health professionals will say that more important than what we eat is what we digest and absorb or assimilate. To this end it is important to consider how our bodies break down the foods we eat into nutrients that actually make it into our cells, organs, muscles, and bones. Even if we eat a good healthy diet, if we are not breaking the food down effectively the nutrients from the foods will be disposed of as waste and we can say we are starving ourselves even though we are eating well.

### **Step 1: Chew Well**

It is in the mouth that digestion begins which is why Mom always told us to chew our food well. It is in the chewing or mastication process that the first digestive enzymes are released by the salivary glands and mixed with food to begin the process of breaking down carbohydrates and fats into absorbable components. The longer we chew our food then, the more effectively these enzymes will get the job done. So the questions we have to ask ourselves are how well do we chew our food and is there room for improvement? Can we take smaller bites? Do we really have to gulp our food down before there is proper mixing of saliva, enzymes and food? Is life really that hectic?

### **Step 2: Eat More Raw Foods**

Chewing sends signals to the stomach to begin secreting hydrochloric acid and other enzymes to break down the proteins as well as continue breaking down the carbohydrates and fats. It is here in the stomach that food is churned and prepared for the final stage of digestion and ultimately, absorption in our small intestine.

Additional enzymes are produced by the lining of our small intestine as well as our pancreas, the organ located just behind our stomach, that perform the most intensive breakdown of the food into nutrients that are absorbed and waste that is eliminated. The pancreas also secretes acid neutralizing bicarbonate. The liver gets involved as well as it sends bile into the small intestine to emulsify the fats.

For many of us it is impossible to keep up with the demand for digestive enzymes. Although many foods such as fresh fruits and vegetables contain enzymes, these foods are not consumed in adequate quantities and cooking and processing destroys their enzymes. Step two then to better absorption is to eat more raw foods. A salad or some raw veggies at each meal and even between meals will certainly help.

### **Step 3: Supplemental Digestive Enzymes**

We should also note that as we approach the age of 30 to 35 our ability to produce enzymes begins to decrease and in some cases, regardless of age, a variety of different conditions or diseases are present that reduce our ability to produce them.



This lack of enzymes can lead to an accumulation of undigested food, metabolic waste and putrefied fecal matter in the intestinal tract which can lead to indigestion, constipation, belching, bloating, food intolerances, allergies, and chronic inflammation, as well as an accumulation of yeast, unfriendly bacteria and parasites and a variety of diseases; some seemingly unrelated to the digestive system.

The bottom line is we need an adequate supply of digestive enzymes in order to achieve and maintain optimal health. Thankfully, there are some good enzyme supplements in the market that we can take at every meal and even in between meals to help us get the most out of the foods we eat. Therefore step three to better absorption is to consistently take a good digestive enzyme with every meal.

#### **Step 4: Choose Well**

Supplemental digestive enzymes come from both plants and animals. Although there are others, here are some of the more common digestive enzymes we'll find when reading the bottles:

- Amylase breaks down carbohydrates, starches, and sugars
- Bromelain (derived from pineapple) breaks down a broad spectrum of proteins and has anti-inflammatory properties
- Cellulase breaks down cellulose (plant fiber)
- Diastase breaks down vegetable starch
- Lactase breaks down lactose (milk sugars)
- Lipase breaks down fats found in most dairy products, nuts, oils, and meat
- Pancreatin (animal-derived) breaks down protein and fats
- Papain (derived from papaya) works well breaking down small and large proteins
- Protease breaks down proteins found in meats, nuts, eggs, and cheese
- Sucrase breaks down complex sugars and starches
- Trypsin (derived from animal pancreas) breaks down proteins

When choosing enzymes notice that there are many types or collections. Some digest only one type of macronutrient while others digest everything. It's really a personal choice. Consider also sensitivity. Some people may be sensitive to certain enzymes and may need to exclude them or take them separately. Sometimes it depends on diet as well. A diet high in protein will need one type while a diet high in carbohydrates will need something else.

Also the value is important. The higher the FCC value (HUT, LU, etc.) the more food volume the enzyme will break down. Like everything else it is a good idea to review product choices with someone who is knowledgeable and it may be necessary to do a little bit of trial and error before settling on the one that is just right for you. Choose well. Eat well. Be well.

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