

# The 4 R's of Healthy Digestion

## Foundational Health Gastrointestinal System

**R**emove, **R**eplace, **R**e-inoculate, & **R**epair

Have you ever been told that “you are what you eat”? It’s such a common expression, but the truth is it’s only partly correct. Sure, the building blocks of your food do become the cells of your body, but if you have faulty digestion you’re likely not absorbing or assimilating any of those wonderful nutrients. It’s more accurate to say “**You are what you digest, assimilate, and absorb**”.

If you struggle with digestive issues you’re not alone. Next to the common cold, digestive problems are the most common reason people seek medical advice. **This is why today I’m going to let you in on a not-so-secret protocol that can seriously change your life if you suffer from digestive problems, and it doesn’t involve popping any medications.**

As you might already be aware, good digestion is the cornerstone of optimal health, so if your digestion is faulty you’re likely suffering from other health challenges as well. If you want to strengthen your immune system and prevent disease, improving your digestion is a must.

This 4-step protocol can be followed by almost anybody, regardless of health challenge or digestive problem; however, the specifics of the protocol need to be individually tailored, which is why it can be really helpful to have someone who’s familiar with it to guide you through the process – especially if you suffer from a more serious digestive disorder.

The 4 R’s have been used successfully for years in Functional Medicine as a protocol for gastrointestinal restoration. The steps don’t necessarily have to be done consecutively for you to obtain results; however, **the first step definitely needs to be addressed in order for the following 3 to be effective.**

This isn’t some quick-fix solution – it requires diligence and dedication – but the result on the other side is well worth the effort. The good news though is that you don’t have to complete all 4 steps before experiencing improvements in your symptoms!

### The 4 R's of Healthy Digestion

#### 1. **Remove**

This step is all about removing the stressors that negatively affect the environment of your GI tract. This includes all allergenic foods and chemical irritants. If you’re unsure of which foods you may be sensitive to it

can be helpful to remove the most common ones like wheat, cow's milk, soy, peanuts, corn, eggs or even all gluten-containing products for a period of time. Often people do really well just eliminating ALL grain from their diet for a few weeks to see if their symptoms improve. Other irritants can include chemicals found in processed foods (i.e. artificial colors, sweeteners, and preservatives), alcohol, and coffee.

This step also involves eradicating pathogenic bacteria, yeasts, or parasites that may be hanging out in your gut (more on this in step 3). And depending on your symptoms it may make sense to eliminate all sugar for a period of time (even natural ones like raw honey and fruit), which is the food source for these organisms. One type of yeast, *Candida Albicans*, can be particularly problematic, and when out of control can manifest as any number of symptoms including bloating, abdominal discomfort, bladder infections, depression, headaches, mental fog, and vaginal infections. In addition to starving these organisms by removing their food source, you can also fight them with a combination of anti-fungal herbs and supplements such as oil of oregano, wormwood, black walnut husk, grapefruit seed extract, caprylic acid, and by adding lots of raw garlic to your food.

Lastly, emotional stress can also have devastating effects on your GI tract and can't be overlooked. Take time to rest and relax, and only eat when you're mentally calm.

## 2. **Replace**

This step refers to adding back or replacing all those factors that may be missing or lacking in the body and diet. In order to digest our food properly we need sufficient amounts of enzymes, hydrochloric acid (HCL), and bile which are all compromised by poor food choices, medications, various diseases, aging, and other factors.

You can think of this step as **doing everything you can to support your digestion** – and it will vary from person to person. Some people will do well supplementing with a digestive enzyme, and possibly one with HCL if acid is low – often mistaken for too much stomach acid. Another remedy for low stomach acid is to drink lemon and water, or 1 tbsp of apple cider vinegar in a little water before your meals to see if your symptoms improve.

Many people will do well by adding more raw vegetables and fruit to their diet which are naturally enzyme-rich, while others with severely compromised digestion may have to avoid raw foods and only eat their veggies and fruits well cooked or blended.

Following the principles of proper food combining and only pairing foods that digest well together will also go a long way in supporting digestion. For example, eating fruit alone and on an empty stomach, separating your starches from your concentrated protein foods, including veggies at each meal, and avoiding taking in too much liquid with food (drink in between meals).

## 3. **Reinoculate**

Our intestinal tracts are host to over 500 different types of bacteria. In fact you might be surprised to know that you have more bacteria in your gut than cells in your body! In a healthy gut there should be a ratio of about 80:20 "good bacteria to bad bacteria", but due to poor diets, overuse of antibiotics and medications, environmental stress, diminished soil integrity, among other factors, most people have the opposite ratio with the "good guys" being out-numbered by the "bad guys" mentioned in step 1.

This step involves replenishing the gut with healthy flora through the use of supplemental probiotics and/or fermented foods such as kefir, kimchi, sauerkraut and miso, which are all naturally rich in probiotics.

Supplementing with a good quality probiotic is especially important during and after antibiotic treatment. Just be sure to take your probiotic away from any of the antifungal herbs mentioned in step 1.

#### **4. Repair**

Once your diet is in check and stressors eliminated (or at least limited), you can begin to repair the damage done and work at regenerating the mucosal lining of the digestive tract with specific nutrients.

Overtime, the lining of the intestinal tract becomes damaged due to all the irritants and stressors mentioned in step 1. As the integrity of the lining is lost, a condition called Leaky Gut Syndrome can ensue where the intestinal lining becomes permeable allowing substances such as large undigested food particles, pathogenic organisms and other chemicals to pass or “leak” through the barrier and into the blood stream at large. These substances are recognized as “foreign invaders” to the body and can trigger an autoimmune response, manifesting as a myriad of unpleasant symptoms, or contributing to or worsening a number of health conditions such as Crohn’s disease, IBS, chronic fatigue syndrome and eczema to name just a few.

There are a number of supplements that can be used to help repair the intestinal tract lining. The best one is L-Glutamine, since this is the preferred food source of the cells of the small intestine. Others include gamma oryzanol (rice bran oil), Deglycyrrhized licorice (DGL), Slippery Elm Bark, Vitamins A, C and zinc.

Remember while the 4 R’s can be followed by almost anyone, the specifics of each step need to be tailored to you as an individual. This is why working with someone who is familiar with the protocol is highly recommended, especially if you suffer from a more serious digestive disorder (as mentioned above).