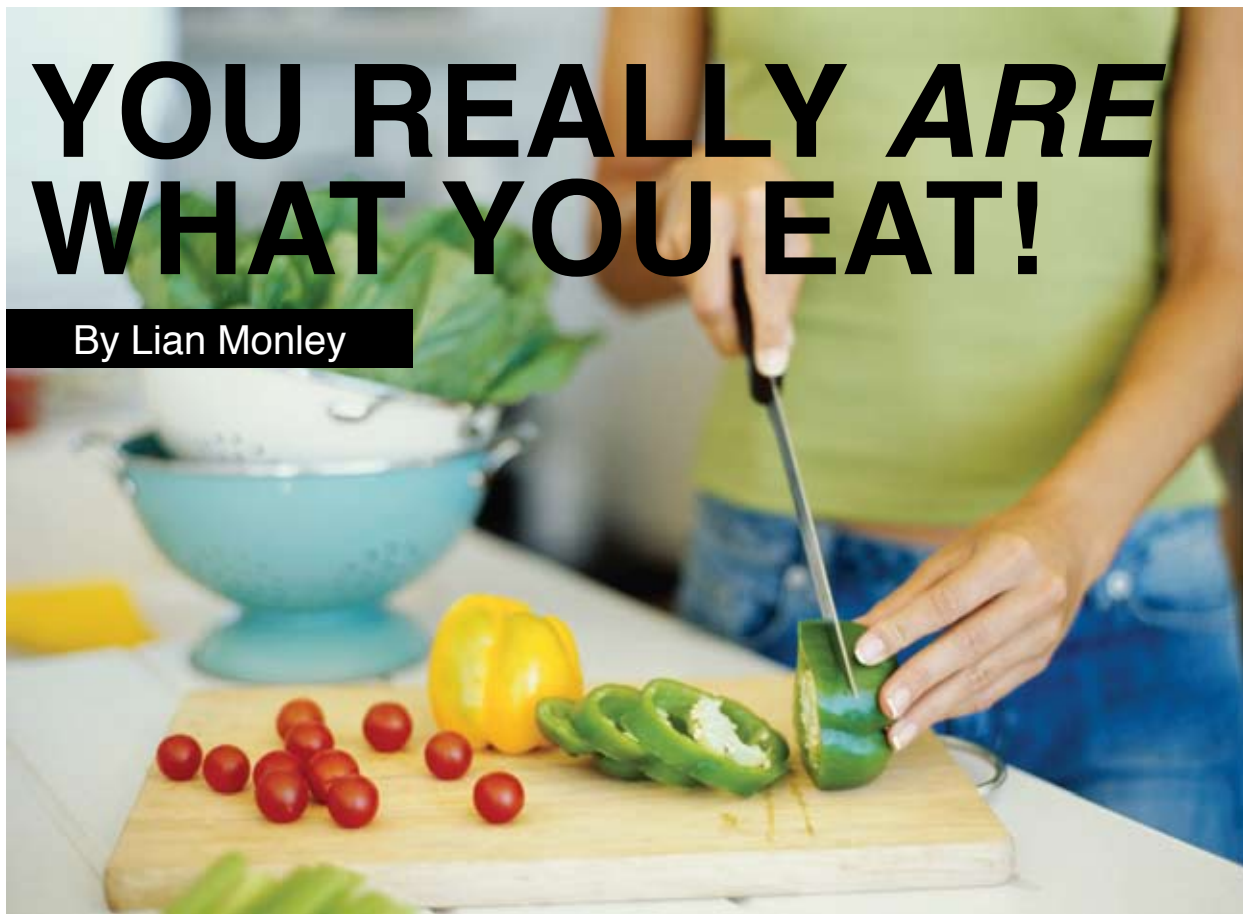


YOU REALLY ARE WHAT YOU EAT!

By Lian Monley



We have all heard the saying, “You are what you eat.” Taken at face value, this statement can be somewhat misleading. A more accurate statement would be, “You are what you absorb.”

Healthy food choices are very important, but those nutritious foods won't do you much good at all if you are not digesting them properly. Even if nutrition is a high priority for you and you spend considerable time and effort (*and money*) eating fresh, organic, nutrient rich foods and taking daily vitamins, you may not be absorbing the nutrients that your body desperately needs to stay healthy.

In fact, many people have dysfunctional digestive systems and don't even know it. Some symptoms of digestive dysfunction are gas, bloating or belching after meals, chronic or frequent fatigue, arthritis, dry or itchy skin (eczema), asthma, migraines, food and environmental allergies, brain fog, ADD and many other illnesses.

If you suffer from any of these conditions, you might want to take a closer look at your digestion. The digestive system consists of two main components: a chemical component and a mechanical component.

The chemical component consists of *digestive enzymes* and gastric juices produced by the mouth, stomach, pancreas, liver and small intestine. The mechanical component –*peristalsis*– is what pushes the food down through your gastrointestinal tract once it leaves your mouth and enters your esophagus.

The majority of digestive problems begin with a dysfunction of the chemical component. This typically consists of an enzyme deficiency and/or an imbalance in gut flora (bacteria).

Both issues are promoted and caused by poor diet, chronic stress, metabolic or endocrine disorders, use of certain prescription drugs or simply the aging process.

A deficiency in stomach acid, known as *hydrochloric acid* (HCL) or the *protease* enzymes will inhibit your ability to break down proteins. This particular

deficiency can lead to brain chemistry imbalances, loss of lean muscle tissue, impaired immunity, food allergies and even more serious metabolic diseases such as diabetes and heart disease.

Maintaining optimum enzyme production is tricky because it relies on the presence of other key factors known as co-factors. These are your vitamins and minerals. A deficiency in just some of these co-factors can be enough to inhibit the digestion and absorption process.

But how do you get these vitamins and minerals out of your food if you already lack the enzymes to break down the food? While this may seem like a catch-22 situation, it can often be handled simply by taking a broad-spectrum enzyme supplement with your meals.

An enzyme supplement should contain, at the minimum, protease, lipase, amylase, cellulase, lactase, sucrase and maltase.

When it comes to gut flora, keep this in mind: there are more bacteria in our intestinal tract than there are cells in our entire body. That's over 100 trillion organisms with a collective weight of about four pounds – roughly the size of our liver.

When this internal ecosystem is in proper balance, it not only promotes optimal digestion, it helps fight infectious disease, normalizes serum cholesterol and triglycerides, breaks down and rebuilds hormones that help to reduce inflammation, manufactures many vitamins in our foods and bodies and increases the bioavailability of essential minerals like calcium and magnesium.

These bacteria aid directly in the digestive process, digesting lactose, breaking down proteins into amino acids, and helping to regulate peristalsis and regular bowel movements.

The causes of imbalance in this gut flora (a condition known as *dysbiosis*) are the same as the causes mentioned above for enzyme deficiencies. Another way of describing dysbiosis is that the bad guys outnumber the good guys.

The solution is simple: eat more fresh, whole foods and take a daily probiotic supplement, consisting

of acidophilus and bifidus, at the minimum.

A dysfunction of the mechanical or peristaltic component of the digestive system is typically caused by inadequate consumption of *water* and *dietary fiber*. The minimum recommended daily fiber-intake is 25 grams.

Since most of us find it difficult to consume five to seven servings of vegetables and fruits per day, fiber supplementation is highly recommended. The minimum daily water intake should be a half ounce for every pound of body weight. One way to verify that your peristaltic component is functioning properly is if you are having two to three bowel movements per day.

The most effective way to prevent all of these digestive problems is to limit your consumption of processed foods such as breads, pastas, cereals and refined sugars. These foods deprive your body of vital, enzyme-friendly nutrients and disrupt peristalsis.

Other ways to prevent problems are to avoid overcooking your foods, limit your exposure to foodborne and environmental toxins and reduce overall stress. ■



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