

SPECIAL FEATURE



# YOUR DIGESTIVE HEALTH

UNDERSTAND. TAKE CONTROL. LIVE BETTER.



[www.CDHF.ca](http://www.CDHF.ca)

Over 20 million Canadians suffer from digestive disorders. Are you one of them?

There are ways to help protect and enhance the system that fuels your life. Read on for a few ideas from the Canadian Digestive Health Foundation on how you can take control of your digestive health with confidence and optimism.

# DIGESTIVE DISEASE: A SERIOUS CONCERN ACROSS THE COUNTRY

digestive disorders  
cost over  
\$18 BILLION  
per year

*“A few times a month the pain was so bad I felt as though I had just drunk acid.”*


SHAWN RICHARZ, lawyer,  
living with gastro-  
esophageal reflux  
disease (GERD)



Did you know that digestive disorders affect about 60 percent of the population, or 20 million Canadians? While some cases are temporary and merely bothersome, many others are chronic and severe, substantially eroding both productivity and quality of life. With direct costs totalling more than \$18 billion per year, digestive disease also puts a considerable strain on the nation's finances.

Perhaps you recognize yourself or a loved one in some of these alarming statistics:

- On average, about five million Canadians experience heartburn and/or acid regurgitation at least once a week
- Irritable bowel syndrome (IBS), which also affects about five million Canadians, has a “severe impact” on more than 45 percent of those affected
- The lag between first symptoms and diagnosis of celiac disease averages one year and may be as long as 12 years
- First-nations people are 1.5 to 2 times more likely to develop digestive disorders
- The number of Canadians with ulcers has increased by 50 percent since 1996
- People with digestive illnesses miss an average of 13.4 days of work per year, adding up to 18 million days per year across the country
- Almost 30,000 Canadians die of digestive disease every year, about 8,900 of them from colorectal cancer



These numbers add up to a lot of suffering, much of it needless: up to 42 percent of digestive disease is preventable, including many ulcers and cancers of the digestive system. Even when a digestive disorder can't be prevented, timely treatment can usually control it and preserve your quality of life.

The lingering stigma surrounding digestive disease leaves many people feeling needlessly isolated and prevents them from seeking appropriate medical attention. Don't be one of these people. Whether it's unexplained stomach pain, heartburn, or food intolerance you're experiencing, take that first step and talk to your doctor.

At the same time, don't hesitate to reach out to the Canadian Digestive Health Foundation (CDHF.ca). As the Foundation of the Canadian Association of Gastroenterology, the CDHF has direct ties to Canada's leading digestive health experts, scientists, and other health care professionals. The CDHF is empowering Canadians to take control of their digestive health with confidence and optimism by providing practical, up-to-date, unbiased information. Armed with trusted information, you may recognize symptoms, understand specific disorders, connect with others who have similar experiences, and find effective ways to manage your digestive health.

42%  
of digestive  
diseases are  
preventable

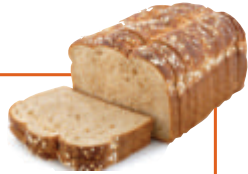
*"I knew something was wrong with me, but I was embarrassed to see somebody about it."*

FERNANDO PISANI,  
NHL hockey player living  
with ulcerative colitis



# FIBRE:

## KEEP IT ROUGH, KEEP IT SIMPLE



### INSOLUBLE

#### FEATURES

Is not broken down or absorbed

#### FUNCTION

Regulates food absorption, improves bowel motility, reduces constipation

#### SOME FOOD SOURCES

Whole wheat, flax seed, green beans, potato skins



### SOLUBLE

#### FEATURES

Dissolves and ferments within the colon

#### FUNCTION

Keeps the colon healthy; may benefit the cardiac and immune systems

#### SOME FOOD SOURCES

Peas, beans, lentils, oats, fruits, broccoli

### A WORD OF CAUTION:

Soluble fibre produces excess gas, which may cause pain and bloating – especially in people with constipation or irritable bowel syndrome (IBS).

Fibre – the components of plant foods your body can't digest or absorb – plays an important role in digestive and general health. Consider these proven benefits:

- Weight maintenance: high-fibre eaters tend to be slimmer
- Better digestion: a non soluble fibre-rich diet counteracts constipation
- A healthier digestive tract: insoluble fibre may help with irritable bowel syndrome and hemorrhoids

Aim for a total daily fibre intake of about 38 grams if you're a man and 25 grams if you're a woman. To limit unwanted gas and bloating, boost your fibre intake over a few weeks. While good fibre supplements are available, your diet can provide you with all the fibre you need.

Try these tips to ease yourself into a fibre-rich diet:

- Try a new breakfast cereal that provides at least 4 grams of fibre per serving
- Try a whole-grain version of a common staple such as bread, tortillas, or pasta
- Throw some legumes (such as black beans or lentils) into soups, stews, or casseroles
- Stir a tablespoon of ground flaxseed into a smoothie

Keep experimenting until you find high-fibre products and recipes you enjoy.

# PROBIOTICS: FRIENDLY BACTERIA FOR BETTER HEALTH



## **PROBIOTICS:**

Live micro-organisms that confer a health benefit when administered in adequate amounts. In plain language, probiotics are “good germs.”

The experts agree: there’s enough scientific evidence to show that probiotics can improve a variety of digestive ailments. And you don’t need to be sick to benefit from probiotics: new research suggests these “friendly” bacteria may help prevent certain infections and support general wellness.

Human intestines contain about 100,000 billion bacteria and 60% of the body’s immune cells – a true “ecosystem.” The multitude of bacteria includes probiotics that help digest food, maintain good health, and counteract certain digestive ailments. As stress, travel, and antibiotic use can upset the balance of probiotics in your digestive system, there are good reasons to supplement your “natural” supply of probiotics with probiotics you take in by mouth (much like medications).

Probiotics work mainly by stimulating the intestinal immune system and by displacing the harmful bacteria that might otherwise cause disease. Specific digestive benefits of probiotics may include:

- Reducing the severity and duration of acute diarrhea (including traveller’s diarrhea and diarrhea caused by antibiotics)
- Treating constipation
- Preventing ulcerative colitis from relapsing
- Improving the symptoms of irritable bowel syndrome (IBS)



- Counteracting lactose intolerance
- Helping to eradicate the infection responsible for ulcers (when paired up with antibiotics)
- Possibly reducing the risk of colorectal and bladder cancer



Ask your doctor which probiotics have been tested and proven effective in clinical trials for the condition you wish to improve.

Probiotics are available as bacterial cultures added to foods (often dairy products) or as dried-cell supplements. Food products often refer to probiotics as “live” or “active” cultures. Watch for probiotic-fortified energy bars, cereals, and cheeses in the next few years.

Different species of probiotics confer different health benefits, so it’s best to select a type that addresses your specific concerns. Considered foods rather than drugs, probiotics aren’t subject to the same regulations that govern prescription medications. Anyone considering a specific probiotic should read up on it to be sure it has been proven effective in clinical trials, discuss it with a doctor, and obtain the probiotic from a reputable source. And remember: you’ll reap the greatest benefits from probiotics if you consume them regularly.

LEARN MORE ABOUT  
YOUR DIGESTIVE HEALTH AT

[www.CDHF.ca](http://www.CDHF.ca)

## DO YOU SUFFER FROM GERD?

Over five million Canadians suffer from Gastroesophageal Reflux Disease (GERD) each year. This disease is often mistaken for a heart attack. The pain can be severe, debilitating, and frightening.

Ask yourself these questions:

- Do I have heartburn more than twice a week?
- Do I often have an acidic taste in my mouth?
- Are my symptoms worse when I eat, lie down, bend over, or do physical activity?
- Are my symptoms affecting my job, social life, sleep patterns?

If you answered **YES** to any of the above, you may be suffering from GERD. Speak to your doctor about safe, effective options.

ARE YOU AT RISK FOR

## COLON CANCER?

22,000 Canadians will be diagnosed with colon cancer this year. You don't have to be one of them. Colon cancer is almost 100% preventable.

Ask yourself these questions:

- Am I over 50 years of age?
- Do I have a family history of colon cancer?
- Have I had a prior diagnosis of polyps or early-stage colon cancer?
- Do I have Inflammatory bowel disease (ulcerative colitis or Crohn's disease)?

If you answered **YES** to any of the above, you could be at risk of developing colon cancer. Please speak to your doctor about getting screened.

To learn more about GERD, colon cancer screening, and protecting your digestive health, visit [www.CDHF.ca](http://www.CDHF.ca).