

Tummy tamers

Don't suffer in silence – herbalist Toni Green shares her natural solutions for digestive woes.



* D-I-Y: Anti-indigestion tincture

Take equal parts of dried peppermint, chamomile, fennel seeds, and meadowsweet, to total 200g. Chop herbs finely and place in a 1.5 litre glass jar with lid. Pour one litre of vodka over herbs, filling jar to the top. Place jar in a warm dark place for six weeks, shaking every few days. Strain, rebottle and label. Take one teaspoonful three times daily, diluted in a little water.

Peppermint (*Mentha piperita*)

Often the herb of choice for an upset stomach or indigestion, it can also treat headaches, anxiety, nausea, diarrhoea, and flatulence. Peppermint relaxes the muscles in the gut, which helps expel wind, and it also improves the flow of bile, which the body uses to digest fats. Enteric-coated peppermint oil capsules have considerable benefits for conditions involving intestinal spasming, such as irritable bowel syndrome (IBS), as well as reducing cramping and bloating. Caution: Peppermint should not be used by anyone with gastroesophageal reflux (GERD).

Chamomile (*Matricaria chamomilla*)

This has anti-spasmodic, anti-inflammatory, antibacterial, carminative, and sedative properties, so when used internally it has a calming, soothing effect on the gut's smooth muscle tissue and the mucous membranes that line it. It eases the 'burn' associated with acid reflex, and is particularly

effective in relieving the indigestion and wind seen with adult or infant colic. Chamomile promotes normal digestion, and has been shown to prevent the gut inflammation caused by cancer treatments.

Slippery elm (*Ulmus rubra*)

With its powerful demulcent (soothing) action, slippery elm is excellent for easing gastrointestinal irritation, gently coating the lining of the oesophagus, stomach, intestines, and bowel. It can be used to treat constipation and diarrhoea, as it both softens and adds bulk to the stool. It is also useful for inflammatory bowel disease disorders, including IBS, Crohn's disease, ulcerative colitis, gastritis, and diverticulitis, and helps to heal stomach or duodenal ulcers by providing a barrier between the ulcer and the stomach acid.

Chamomile eases the 'burn' associated with acid reflux, and is great for colic in both children and adults.

Fennel (*Foeniculum vulgare*)

A traditional carminative - meaning it soothes digestion - fennel is a common ingredient in "gripe water" It will alleviate cramping, indigestion, bloating, and gut spasms. Volatile oils in fennel have anti-spasmodic and anti-inflammatory properties that relax tense intestinal muscles, allowing trapped gas to be expelled, and also stimulate digestion, preventing this gas build-up in the first place. Note: Fennel is oestrogenic, and so is contraindicated in pregnancy and breastfeeding.

Meadowsweet (*Filipendula ulmaria*)

This is considered a 'normaliser' for the digestive tract, balancing both high and low stomach acid, as heartburn and indigestion can be caused by both high and low stomach acid levels. Its astringent action boosts cell renewal rate, so irritated areas heal faster. Meadowsweet is especially helpful for arthritis sufferers who have gastritis from taking NSAIDs, and for indigestion, diarrhoea, and gastrointestinal bleeding. *

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