The 30-foot Pathway
A Guide to Intestinal Health

Charles Remington
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There is a 30-foot pathway that, in the Western world, is overlooked and at times ignored. The condition of this passageway plays an important role in an individual’s quality of life and longevity. It is the gateway that guards us from invaders, which may lead to disease and eventual death. So where is this 30-foot tract found? It is found in the abdomen region of every human and is called the intestinal tract.

In Eastern medical practice, the condition or health of the intestinal tract is extremely important. Ayurvedic medicine, which dates back some 5,000 years, places great importance on cleansing and detoxifying the intestinal tract. A therapy called Shodan is used to rid the body of toxins and to aid in healing and restoring health. Ayurvedic medicine views toxins as the root cause of all disease; toxins are believed to stem from undigested and unabsorbed food, which builds up on the walls of the large intestine or colon and becomes a breeding ground for bacteria and parasites.

In Western medicine, many of the antibiotics that some experts believe are over-used to treat infection and rid the body of bacteria may actually weaken intestinal health and compromise our bodies’ natural healing powers. Dr. Mark Pochapin, Director of Gastrointestinal Health at New York Presbyterian Hospital, has been quoted as saying, “Indiscriminate killing of good and bad bacteria is too drastic.” Pochapin further states that, “In fact some doctors point to reduced bacterial counts in the intestines for the upsurge in intestinal disorders such as Irritable Bowel Syndrome and Crohn’s Disease.” It’s time for East to meet West and to develop a system of health where its foundations are built on prevention rather than repair.

The intestinal tract transforms the foods we eat into macro (protein, carbohydrate and fats) and micro (vitamins, minerals, enzymes, phytochemicals and fiber) nutrients, which provide the building blocks for cellular repair and energy for life. The intestines also remove the by-products of waste and toxins from the transformed food, which, if allowed to remain in our system, could lead to disease and possible death.

The three functions of the intestinal tract are digestion, absorption and elimination. The first 25 feet of the intestines, called the small intestine, consists of three parts – the duodenum, ileum and jejunum. Together, they perform the function of digestion and absorption. The cells in the wall of the small intestine, called the mucosa, secrete mucus, peptidase, maltase, lactase and lipase, along with the enzymes and digestive bile secreted from the liver, pancreas and gallbladder, to digest food and make it available to be absorbed through the small intestine’s walls to enter the blood to be used by all cells.

The last five feet of the intestines, the large intestine or colon, consists of five parts the cecum colon, ascending colon, transverse colon, descending colon and sigmoid colon, which completes the function of absorption of certain vitamins, minerals and water. The colon then performs the function of formation and elimination of feces consisting of nutrient-void food, along with toxins that are the byproducts of chemical digestion. Unlike the small intestines, the mucosa cells in the walls of the large intestine produce only mucus, which protect the cells from the toxins in the waste material as it passes by. It takes three to ten hours for the partially digested food called chyme to pass through the small intestine and enter into the large intestine. The transit time of waste material in the large intestine can be hours or days. It is this extended period of digestion, absorption and elimination that provides the battleground for bacterial microorganisms to play a major role in keeping our defense mechanisms free of disease. We don’t catch diseases; we create them when our natural defense mechanisms are broken down.

What are your first thoughts when you think of bacteria? Are they good or bad? If you’re thinking of the kitchen counter or toilet seat, your anti-bacterial conditioning will have you saying bacteria is bad. However, when it comes to your intestinal health, the correct answer is both. We need good bacteria to digest food, to synthesize vitamins and minerals, to clean up toxins and dead cells and to compete with the bad bacteria for nutrients. The bad bacteria are pathogenic and disease-causing. They attempt to overtake our immune systems and compete for the same nutrients that bring life to our bodies. So, for optimum health, we must understand the intestinal world of friendly or harmful bacteria. The lyrics in Dave Mason’s hit song say, “There ain’t no good guys, there ain’t no bad guys, there’s only you and me and we just disagree.” I hope you and I agree on this: He was not singing about your intestinal tract. There is a war taking place in our intestinal tracts between the good guys (good bacteria) and the bad guys (bad bacteria) each day.

Dr. Todd Klaenbaner, professor at North Carolina State University and recognized expert in intestinal bacterial flora, states, “The number of bacterial cells found in the intestinal tract outnumber the human cells ten to one.” He estimates there are 500 strains of bacteria in the human intestinal tract. The good news, Dr. Klaenbaner says, is that the good bacteria outnumber the bad bacteria – good 80 percent, bad 20 percent – in individuals experiencing good health. The bad news is that the ratios can be reversed – bad 80 percent and good 20 percent in patients experiencing intestinal disturbances.

Dr. Mark Pimentel, co-director of the gastrointestinal motility program at Cedars-Sinai Medical Center, reports that 78 percent of Irritable Bowel Syndrome (IBS) patients in their research projects have an overgrowth of bad bacteria in the small intestine. This study suggests that IBS, a chronic condi-
Recent medical studies have estimated that 85 percent of the North American adult population is infected with at least one form of parasite. Built-up fecal material on the colon walls provides the ideal birthing ground for parasites. A GCNM course on Toxicity and Detoxification reveals that humans can play host to more than 100 different kinds of parasites. Parasites, which are organisms that feed, grow and live off a host, can be microscopic or can grow as large as several feet. Parasites are found mostly in the large intestine but they try to permeate the intestinal wall and migrate to other parts of the body. The most common source of infections from parasites are under-cooked meats, unwashed fruits and vegetables, time spent in developing countries, contaminated water and infection by mosquitoes. The most commonly occurring parasites in North America are roundworm, hookworm, pinworm and tapeworm.

Parasites can devastate our health in the following ways:
1. They weaken the immune system.
2. They prevent the proper absorption of macro and micro nutrition of foods eaten.
3. They cause inflammation, and irritation to all tissues.
4. They produce toxic wastes, which are absorbed into the blood system.
5. They perforate and damage the intestinal wall lining, as they try to work their way to other regions in the body.
6. They can cause intestinal and pancreatic bile duct obstruction.

What is the best offense to defend us from these invading mutants? A nutritional lifestyle will naturally keep the intestinal tract spic and span, using nutritional sponges and scrubbing pads found in whole grains, fruits and vegetables. These foods are an abundant source of vitamins, minerals, enzymes and phytochemicals, and are rich in fiber. Add to this microbe-fighting powerhouse three things: organic, organic, organic. Learn to use only organic whole grains, fruits and vegetables, which are devoid of pesticides. Pesticides might make economical sense to some farmers, but they can bankrupt our intestinal environment.

To maintain good intestinal health, our bodies require 30 or more grams of fiber daily. Fiber is divided into two types: soluble and insoluble. Insoluble fiber is vital in formation of stools and decreases the time that it takes for waste to be eliminated from our systems. Poor transit time of waste material increases the feeding time for bad bacteria and the risk of certain colon cancers. Insoluble fibers prevent the buildup of mucus and fecal material on intestinal walls, which lead to poor absorption of nutrients into the body, which in turn can lead to deficiencies such as anemia or osteoporosis. In addition, soluble fiber acts to absorb digestive bile, which is made from cholesterol, so when eliminated causes more cholesterol to be converted to digestive bile, thereby lowering blood cholesterol (LDL) levels.

The knowledge to bring healing and prevent disease by maintaining intestinal health is thousands of years old. Greek and Roman writings that are 2,000 years old describe fermented milk (lactobacillus), garlic and onion (which feed Bifidobacteria) as standard practices for physicians treating intestinal disorders and preventing sickness and disease. Indian writings called the Vedas, which are 5,000 years old, describe the use of enemas for intestinal cleansing. The modern science of Microbiology has expanded on this knowledge and documented its effect on intestinal wellness. Probiotics, prebiotics and symbiotics are the latest cutting edge use of these ancient healing techniques.

The word probiotic comes from the Greek, and means pro-life. It is administered by eating live bacterial organisms. Probiotic bacteria not only survive digestion, but aid in digestion. The most numerous of the probiotic bacteria are Lactobacillus, Acidophilus and Bifidobacteria, however there are hundreds of others strains. The best food sources of these bacteria are yogurt and kefir, but they can also be taken in liquid, powder, capsule or pill forms.

Look for organic yogurt (made without the use of antibiotics and toxic pesticides) and be sure the label certifies it contains live active cultures like Lactobacillus (L) Acidophilus, Bifidus, L. Casei and L. Reuteri. The challenge is for the bacteria to survive the hostile gastric juice environment of the stomach, on its way to the small intestines to add to the colony of existing bacteria and become food for future bacteria.

Prebiotics are non-digestible fiber foods that act as a host to feed and promote bacterial colonies – most notably bifidobacteria – mainly in the large intestine. The formation of short chain fatty acids from these fiber foods not only feed the good bacteria, but also the muscosa cells in the colon wall. Prebiotics play a role in the muscosa cells’ ability to absorb the minerals calcium, magnesium and iron, along with the vitamins niacin, folic acid, B-6 and vitamin K. Prebiotic foods contain the phytochemicals inulin and oligosaccharids, and are found in garlic, onions, asparagus, artichokes, chicory, bananas, wheat, barley and rye. It is estimated that Americans eat less than three grams daily of these foods, far less than what is needed for optimum intestinal health.

Prebiotic refers to the combining of both probiotic and prebiotic in the same product. A good example are the latest yogurts that contain live active cultures (probiotic) and add inulin (prebiotic). This makes for a winning combination to add to the number of good bacteria, both in the small intestine (lactobacillus) and large intestine (bifidobacteria).

Autointoxication is self-poisoning caused by bad bacteria,
metabolic wastes and other toxins produced within the large intestine. It originates in an unhealthy colon and often results in constipation. What steps can be taken to maintain optimum intestinal health? A detoxification program is a good start, but those with extremely weak immune systems should use caution. Eat a diet of organic whole grains, fruits and vegetables, with 30 grams daily of both soluble and insoluble fiber. Incorporate a daily routine of both probiotic and prebiotic foods. Drink eight to ten glasses of pure water to assist the elimination process. A lifestyle of three to four hours of exercise weekly will aid in mechanical digestion and reduce transit time of waste elimination. Avoid all processed foods, white flour, simple sugars and alcohol, which are the foods of choice for bad bacteria.

Avoid eating beef and poultry that are raised on antibiotics. Almost half of all antibiotics used in U.S. each year are given to livestock. Be aware that continued use of aspirin or drugs like acetaminophen, ibuprofen or oral contraceptives deplete the good bacteria. Flatulence and abdominal bloating may occur in the initial stage of introducing foods that are probiotic and prebiotic; this is the result of the breakdown of unfriendly bacteria and the fermentation of the friendly bacteria. If it becomes too unpleasant, introduce these foods more slowly to your daily routine. Taking a digestive enzyme is helpful when increasing fiber to a minimum of 30 grams daily, especially if you have been consuming, like most people, 10 grams or less daily.

In closing, I’m reminded of a meeting I once had with a couple on the techniques of good nutrition. They had brought their son Jarred, who at the time was four years old. During the meeting he interrupted and asked, “Charlie why is there bad?” I looked into his eyes and said, “Good always takes care of bad; always keep your eyes on good and you won’t have to be concerned about bad.” That could not be more true when it comes to our intestinal health. Develop a lifestyle committed to organic whole grains, fruits and vegetables. Avoid the overuse of antibiotics and keep the immune system in peak performance, maintaining the good bacterial flora that brings life and health and lowering the bad bacterial flora that can lead to illness.

Charles Remington is a nutritionist and herbalist who is the author of a best-selling nutritional software program. He has been a featured guest on many television talk and news shows, as well as national radio broadcasts, delivering his message that “Food’s not the problem, it’s the solution”. His articles on health and fitness have been featured in national and international publications. Known to his thousands of clients as The Fat Loss Coach, his concepts on healthy weight loss are well embraced by the medical community and supported by a large insurance provider. He has conducted more than 200 seminars in the corporate, municipal and education arenas and manages a nutritional practice in Cheshire, Connecticut. Contact him at charlie@thefatlosscoach.com or visit his website www.thefatlosscoach.com.

Avoiding the Dirty Dozen

Even though organic food is the healthiest choice, you can’t always find locally-grown food without pesticides – especially this time of the year in northern climates. So the Environmental Working Group (ESG) has come to your rescue with the brand new version of their Shopper’s Guide to Pesticides in Produce.

The Shopper’s Guide is a handy, wallet-size card that lists the “Dirty Dozen” most contaminated fruits and vegetables, as well as the 12 most “Consistently Clean” items. The guide, which is available for free download at www.foodnews.org, was developed by ESG based on the results of nearly 43,000 tests for pesticides on produce by the U.S. Department of Agriculture and the Food and Drug Administration between 2000 and 2004. EWG’s computer analysis found that consumers could cut their pesticide exposure by almost 90 percent by avoiding the most contaminated fruits and vegetables and eating the least contaminated instead.

“Federal produce tests tell us that some fruits and vegetables are so likely to be contaminated with pesticides that you should always buy them organic,” said Richard Wiles, ESG’s senior vice president. “Others are so consistently clean that you can eat them with less concern. With the Shopper’s Guide in your pocket, it’s easy to tell which is which.”

EWG’s analysis of federal testing data found:

- Peaches and apples topped the Dirty Dozen list. Almost 97 percent of peaches tested positive for pesticides and almost 87 percent had two or more pesticide residues. About 92 percent of apples tested positive and 79 percent had two or more pesticides. The rest of the Dirty Dozen include sweet bell peppers, celery, nectarines, strawberries, cherries, pears, imported grapes, spinach, lettuce and potatoes.

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- Onions, avocados, and sweet corn headed the Consistently Clean list. For all three foods, more than 90 percent of the samples tested had no detectable pesticide residues. Others on the Consistently Clean list include pineapples, mango, asparagus, sweet peas, kiwi, bananas, cabbage, broccoli and papaya.

While washing and rinsing fresh produce can reduce levels of some pesticides, it does not eliminate them. Peeling also reduces exposures, but valuable nutrients often are eliminated with the peel. The best option is to eat a varied diet, wash all produce and choose organic when possible.

Although the Shopper’s Guide only measures pesticide residues on produce, buying organic also makes sense if you’re concerned about bacterial contamination. Certified organic farmers meet all the sanitation standards required of conventional growers and, on top of that, meet tight restrictions on the use of compost and other organic material that do not apply to conventional fruit and vegetable growers.
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