

An anatomical model of the human digestive system is shown, featuring the esophagus, stomach, and intestines. A stethoscope is placed over the model, and a hand in a blue glove is visible, suggesting a medical or educational context. The title "What Happens to the Food You Eat" is overlaid in large white text.

What Happens to the Food You Eat

Your digestive system is essentially a long tube running through your body, and as food moves through it, your body breaks it down and selectively pulls in what it needs.

This 30-foot tunnel is essentially your body's interface with the outside world. What you eat does become part of you, but not all at once. It has to be broken down, processed, absorbed, and allowed in, and that depends on a well-functioning system, including a strong gut lining, a balanced microbiome, and an immune system that knows what to let in and what to keep out.

It starts in your mouth. Chewing breaks food into smaller pieces and mixes it with saliva, which begins digesting carbohydrates. This step sets things up, breaking food down and starting the process your body will carry through the rest of the way.

Once swallowed, the stomach churns and mixes food with acid and enzymes, starting protein breakdown and controlling the pace at which food moves forward. Rather than sending everything through at once, it releases food gradually over the next couple of hours into the small intestine, a roughly 20-foot-long structure built for optimal absorption.

The intestinal lining is covered in millions of finger-like projections that come into contact with your food. All of that surface area adds up to the floor space of a 2-car garage, ensuring your body has ample opportunity to draw in nutrients efficiently.

With few exceptions, the small intestine is where nutrients from food enter the body, including macros, vitamins, minerals, antioxidants, and other protective phytonutrients. But not everything is taken in, because the system is selective and how much you absorb can change depending on the condition of your gut lining and what foods are eaten together.

A major driver of this selective process is your microbiome, the population of microorganisms residing in your digestive tract. It helps regulate what gets absorbed, supports the gut lining, and plays a role in broader aspects of health,

including immune function and even mental health. As a result, the same meal can be handled very differently by two people, or even by the same person at different points in time.

This stage can take several hours as food moves through. What started as a chewed mass and then a thick, semi-liquid mixture in the stomach becomes more fluid here as it's mixed, broken down, and gradually absorbed. Enzymes from the pancreas and bile from the liver continue working on it while steady waves of involuntary muscle contractions keep it moving along.

What's left then moves into the large intestine, and this part takes longer than you might expect, often a full day or more. By now, most of the nutrients have already been absorbed, and what remains is more liquid, made up mostly of water, fiber, and whatever your body didn't need.

Here, your body and your gut microbes work together in a different way, with microbes taking on a more active role. They ferment the fiber that made it this far, producing beneficial compounds that support gut health and play a role in your immune system. Fermentation also produces gases, which is a normal part of the process.

At the same time, your body is actively reclaiming water, gradually changing the consistency from liquid to something more solid. It is a controlled process that helps regulate hydration and keep things moving the way they should. When this process is off, you tend to notice it pretty quickly. By the time that process is complete, what's left reflects thousands of small decisions your body made along the way about what to break down, what to absorb, what to keep out, and what to let go, and that process plays a direct role in how your body responds to the food you eat.

Over longer stretches of time, those differences add up. Some people move effortlessly through their day without thinking about digestion at all, while others deal with ongoing issues like bloating, discomfort, or food not sitting well. Those outcomes reflect the condition of your digestive system, which is shaped by the choices you make day after day.

Your body does not just react to what you eat in the moment. It is responding based on the system you have built over time.

Spring Green Soup with Herbs and Lemon



Let's celebrate spring with a simple but nutrient-dense green soup.

Ingredients:

- 1 tbsp olive oil
- 1 bunch green onions, chopped
- 2 cloves garlic, chopped
- 1 zucchini, chopped
- 1 cup peas (fresh or frozen)
- 4 cups vegetable broth
- 2 handfuls spring greens, chopped (spinach, arugula, or a mix)
- Fresh herbs, chopped (parsley, dill, or basil)
- Juice of ½ lemon
- Salt and pepper

Instructions:

1. Heat olive oil in a pot over medium heat. Add the green onions and cook for a few minutes until softened. Add the garlic and zucchini and cook for another 3 to 5 minutes.
2. Stir in the peas and broth. Bring to a simmer and cook for about 10 minutes, until everything is tender.
3. Add the greens and herbs and cook just until wilted, about a minute. Add the greens and herbs and cook just until wilted, about a minute. Finish with lemon juice, salt, and pepper. Taste and adjust as needed.

Note: if you want a blended green soup, just pulse the mixture in a blender or food processor until it reaches desired consistency.