This HERB Before Meals May Improve Your Digestion (Science-Backed) Transcript

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What if one of the simplest ways to improve digestion is something modern diets have largely removed? I'm talking about bitterness. For centuries, traditional healing systems used bitter herbs before meals to stimulate digestion.

And today, research is helping us understand why this ancient practice may actually work. Your body has specialized receptors that detect bitter compounds not only on your tongue but throughout your digestive tract.

When those receptors are activated, they can trigger signals involved in saliva production, digestive secretions, gastrocustinal hormones, gallbladder pancreatic function, and the digestion and absorption of food.

So what are digestive bitters? Well, biters are exactly what the name suggests. They're herbs containing compounds with a distinctly bitter taste. Some commonly recognized bitter herbs include jianxian root, danguline root and wormwood.

Bitter herbs have a long history of medicinal use in traditional Chinese medicine. European herbal medicine and North American naturopathic medicine. In fact, by the early 20th century, the medical profession recognized the ability of bitters to improve digestion.

But as modern medicine became increasingly focused on pharmaceutical treatment, their traditional use of digested biters largely disappeared from conventional practice.

They never disappeared from herbal and naturopathic medicine. And today we're beginning to understand some of the physiology behind them. Now, one important caution.

Not every bitter plant is safe simply because it tastes bitter. Some bitter herbs can be toxic. So I'm talking specifically about established, medicinal herbs and properly formulated digestive bitters, not randomly consuming bitter plants.

Now when you taste something bitter, specialized bitter taste receptors detect it. Most people assume these receptors are located only on the tongue, they're not.

Research has demonstrated that bitter receptors found throughout the gastrointestinal tract. They're found in areas including the stomach, intestines and pancreas.

They're also present on specialized cells in the digestive tract called enteroendocrine cells. And humans have more than 25 different types of taste receptors that detect bitterness.

So bitterness isn't simply a flavor, it's information. When bitter compounds activate these receptors, they can initiate physiological responses involved in digestion.

So how does this all work? Well, one proposed mechanism begins your mouth and throat. You taste something bitter, bitter receptors become activated. That signal stimulates the nervous system, saliva production increases, and importantly, there's stimulation involving the vagus nerve.

The vagous nerve is one of the major communication pathways connecting your brain with your digestive organs. This is part of something I emphasize frequently in integrative medicine.

Digestion doesn't begin in your stomach. It begins before food ever reaches your tummy. Think about what happens when you smell your favorite meal cooking.

You may begin salivating. Your digestive system is already preparing for food. Gators appear to take advantage of some of these natural preparatory mechanisms.

Now again, the vagus nerve deserves special attention. Your digestive tract doesn't operate independently from your nervous system. The brain and digestive track are in constant communication.

And the Vagus nerve is a major part of that communication system, so when you're relaxed and preparing to eat, your body can shift toward what is commonly called the rest and digest state.

Digestive activity is supported, but think about how people eat today. They're stressed, they're working, looking at their phone, answering their emails, or eating in the car.

And then they wonder why they feel bloated after eating. It's well known that chronic stress can interfere with normal digestive physiology. This is one reason I found digestive bitters are particularly interesting for people whose digestion seems to worsen during periods of chronic stress.

Bitters help support digestive function, while you're also addressing the underlying stress, of course they don't replace stress management though. You still need to address the root cause.

Hey, one second, if you're looking for help with any type of health issue, I put together a line of doctor grade supplements that I formulated myself.

They're the same formulas I use with my patients. Click the link below to check them out. Okay, back to the video. Then there's another mechanism that I mentioned at the beginning.

That's equally interesting. Bitters don't necessarily have to work only through taste receptors in the mouth. Remember, bitter receptors are located throughout the gastrointestinal tract.

And when bitter compounds interact with these receptors, they can influence the release of hormones involved in digestion and nutrient absorption. One particularly important digestive hormone is called cholecystokinin or CCK.

Cck is produced by cells in the small intestine and released into the bloodstream when we eat. It then communicates with digestive organs, including the gallbladder, pancreas, and stomach.

These signals help coordinate digestion and absorption. Research has showed even when bitters are taken in the capsule, they stimulate the release of CCK.

That's interesting because it tells us something important. Again, you may not necessarily have to taste the bitterness for every physiological effect to occur.

So this brings up a common question. Are liquid biters better than capsules or are capsuls just fine? Well, traditionally bitters have been taken as liquids, and there may be advantages to actually tasting the bitter compounds because you're immediately activating receptors in the mouth and throat.

Most liquid formulas commonly contain combinations of bitter herbs. However, research suggests that capsule forms can also produce, again, these physiological beneficial effects from digestion.

So really, both will work properly. It's just a matter of what you're gonna use on a consistent basis. Most of my patients actually use the capsule form, but liquid is a great form to use.

And traditionally, in European herbal medicines, the liquid forms have been preferred. Now there's another proposed benefit to using these bitter herbs for digestion, and that is circulation.

Bitters have traditionally been thought to improve blood circulation to the abdominal digestive organs. Why would that matter? because your digestive organs require adequate blood flow to function properly.

Circulation supports the production of digestive juices, movement of food through the digestive tract, the absorption of nutrients, and removal of metabolic waste products.

So healthy digestion depends not only in what you're eating, it also depends upon adequate nerve and bloodflow to the digest track. Again, digestion is much more complicated than simply having enough stomach acid or digestive enzymes.

It's an integrated physiological process. Now I want to talk about gentian root, one of the classic digestive bitters. Also known as gentiana lutea, there are different species of gentians that have been used medicinally throughout the world.

Gentian is extremely bitter and has a long history as a digestive toner. One German study showed that gentia root can be effective in helping people with heartburn, nausea and stomach aches.

even digestive symptoms such as vomiting, loss of archetype, constipation, bloating, and flatulence and so there's a wide variety of digestive conditions that gentian appears to have a tonic effect on.

In one study, participants received 120 milligrams of gentia root in capsule form two to three times daily for 15 consecutive days. The reported results were quite interesting.

31% reported excellent results, 55% report good results and 9% percent reported moderate benefit. Only 5% reporting an inadequate response. That means the large majority reported either good or excellent result.

And this type of study supports something that herbal practitioners have observed for a very long time. Bitter herbs can influence digestive function.

Now, bitters are a great choice for chronic digestive problems. In naturopathic and integrative medicine, Bitters aren't necessarily something we use only once.

For someone with chronic digestion problems, they may be used for several weeks or sometimes months. Traditionally, we think of biters as a digestive toner.

One way to describe this is that bitter's may help retrain the digestive system to function more efficiently. Now that's particularly relevant when digestive function has been chronically suppressed.

And once again, stress is an excellent example. If you've been under tremendous stress for much, your nervous system and digestive system may not be functioning optimally together.

Bitters can be one component of a broader strategy while you're addressing again stress, your sleep habits, what you're eating, meal timing, and overall digestive function.

And remember, bitters can also help with the health of the intestinal barrier and the microbiome. But when should you take biters? Well, timing is relatively simple.

Digestive bitter are generally taken before a meal or with a meals. That makes physiological sense. You're trying to prepare and support the digestive system at the same time that food is arriving.

And again, as I mentioned earlier, bitters can be used either in liquid form or capsule form. Liquid biters allow you to actually experience the bitter taste and stimulate receptors in the mouth.

And capsules can activate receptors further down the digestive tract. So who should not use bitter? Digestive bitters are generally considered safe when appropriate medicinal herbs are used correctly, like any other Tycho supplement.

However, if you have active ulcers or gastritis, then you should avoid digestive biters. We don't want to aggravate stomach acid from irritating the lining of the stomach, small intestinal, or the natural mucus layer.

has been reduced. Also, caution should be used if you have abdominal pain, vomiting, blood in your stool, black or

tarry stools, unexplained weight loss, difficulty swelling.

Of course, these are all things you should review with your integrative doctor. Again, persistent severe heartburn. Now, sometimes bitters are helpful and in some cases it could be aggravating.

So again, work with you holistic doctor or nutritionist in terms of how you're using the bitter supplements. I hope you enjoyed this video on bitters that can be an important part of healing up your digestive system.