



Chew On This

As the holidays approach, most busy executives are rushed and stressed. And this generally means trying to cut corners to get it all done – including gulping down meals. Unfortunately, a hastily eaten bite can mean weight gain, gas, bloating and even poor health.

Although you may assume that the stomach is where digestion begins, in reality, chewing is a critical first step in the digestive process. In fact, the mechanics of chewing provide multiple digestive components. First, thorough chewing breaks the food down into smaller food molecules which creates an increased surface area, ultimately facilitating good digestion. If you are used to gobbling down your meals, you've probably also had the discomfort of indigestion and embarrassment of flatulence. That's because food that is too big to be properly broken down facilitates bacteria growth in the colon. Not to mention that nutrients can't be absorbed properly.

Another mechanical process is the saliva produced by chewing. Not only does the first stage of fat digestion begin through the secretion of the enzyme lingual lipase by glands located under the tongue, but carbohydrate digestion also begins as the salivary alpha-amylase breaks down the chemical bonds that connect simple sugars which comprise starches.

Plus, longer contact with saliva helps lubricate food, making it easier to pass through the esophagus to the stomach. Longer chewing and the saliva produced also relax your stomach to help move food particles from your stomach into your small intestine. And because your stomach muscles must twist and contract to mix your food, if you swallow big chunks of food without the support of saliva, you are making your stomach work harder and even causing it to stretch.

Taking the time to taste and enjoy your meals leisurely is not just more pleasurable, but can lead to weight loss. Because it takes about 20 minutes for the brain to receive the signal that your stomach – about the size of a loose fist - is full, chewing more slowly can minimize overeating. Studies have shown that eating more deliberately and chewing more carefully can help cut calories, enough to lead to an average weight loss of about 20 lbs a year. A chewing rule of thumb is to chew each mouthful 50 times in 30 seconds. It also helps to sip water or other beverages slowly while eating because too much liquid can reduce the efficiency of your digestive process.



In addition to the science of chewing more slowly, stopping to savor a meal with family and friends can lead to a more healthy and less stressful lifestyle.

If you want more tips on how to lead a healthier life, contact your doctor at Executive MD for a wellness workup.

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