Are You Getting Enough Smoothage?

Lower cholesterol, soothe intestinal inflammation, reduce your risk of colon cancer with the power of mucilaginous fiber

Fiber is essential to having good health. According to organizations like the Institute of Medicine and the American Dietetic Association, women need about 25 grams of fiber per day and men need about 38 grams per day. In contrast, the average adult American only gets 15 grams of fiber per day.

That's not nearly enough fiber to maintain good health, especially when these estimates are at the low end of what is required for optimal health. And there are some groups of people who get a lot more fiber than this in their diets. For example, a study done on the diets of the Hadza hunter-gatherers of Tanzania found that they got about 100 grams of fiber in their daily diets.

Getting enough fiber will reduce or even eliminate your risk of many diseases. For starters, it is essential to the health of your colon. Taken with adequate water, fiber prevents constipation and adequate amounts greatly reduce your risk of colon cancer. Fiber also helps maintain a healthy gut flora, which keeps your immune system healthy.

Fiber will help lower your blood sugar, cholesterol, and triglycerides, reducing your risk of diabetes and heart disease. Furthermore, it also binds toxins, reducing inflammation in the body, which reduces your risk of all chronic and degenerative illnesses.

In this issue of *Sunshine Sharing*, we'll introduce two types of fiber and focus on the value of the second type, soluble fiber. We'll discuss the many benefits of this type of fiber and introduce you to herbs and formulas that are rich in it.

The Two Types of Fiber

There are two basic kinds of fiber—insoluble or crude fiber and soluble fiber. Crude fiber has been appropriately called roughage, because it is coarser, but soluble fiber should really be called smoothage, because it is soothing and lubricating to tissues when it is properly hydrated.

Crude fibers are made up of cellulose, hemicellulose, and lignin. These are the fibers that make plants woody or stringy. Grass, seed coatings, and peelings contain this type of fiber, bran being a good example. We can't digest this fiber, but it does bulk the stool and help move things through the digestive tract. It's been likened to a broom that helps to sweep the colon clean.

Water soluble fibers include gums and mucilaginous fibers, also known as mucopolysaccharides. To break that down into common language, these fibers consist of many (poly) sugars (saccharides) strung together in a similar manner to starch. These chains of sugar molecules absorb water, which is where the mucco (the same root as the word mucous) comes in. When dissolved in water they form a slippery, slimy, gelatin-like mass, which is why we're calling them smoothage, rather than roughage.

Unlike starch, however, your body cannot break these mucopolysaccharides apart to get energy from them. Instead, they hold onto water in the digestive tract, helping to keep stool bulky and soft. They also serve as food for the friendly bacteria in the digestive tract.

Plants use these compounds to help them store water and food. The slimy material inside of a cactus stem or an aloe vera leaf is a perfect example of this. These plants from hot, dry climates are able to store water during rainy seasons to use during drier periods.

Most fruits and vegetables contain significant amounts of this fiber, which keeps the food juicy. For example, apples, pears, plums or prunes, berries, carrots, onions, and sweet potatoes all contain this type of fiber. It is also found in some seeds (flax and chia) and legumes (beans

Continued on page 2

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Continued from page one

and peas). Eating these types of food is the best way to obtain the smoothage your body needs, but you can also increase the amount you get by taking mucilaginous herbs also known as mucilant herbs.

Major Health Benefits of Mucilant Herbs

Herbal sources of water-soluble fiber include psyllium, slippery elm, marshmallow root, various seaweeds, aloe vera, and cactus (nopal). Taken internally, or applied topically, these herbs offer some of the following health benefits.

Weight Loss: Mucilaginous fiber swells in your stomach to provide a feeling of fullness, which means they help you feel fuller so you eat less. This fiber also slows the absorption of the fats and sugars in food, so that the food you eat burns more slowly so you won't get hungry as fast. This slow burn also helps manage weight by regulating blood sugar and preventing harmful spikes.

Managing Cholesterol: As high as 60 percent of the cholesterol manufactured in your liver is used to make bile to help digest fat. Mucilants help eliminate excess cholesterol by binding to the cholesterol in bile preventing it from being reabsorbed. Thus, increasing the amount of mucilaginous fiber in your diet is a natural way to manage your cholesterol.

Detoxification: As mucilaginous fiber swells with water, it also absorbs and binds chemicals like pesticides and food additives, which prevents absorption and aids elimination. It also binds toxins excreted from the liver via the bile. The liver neutralizes toxins for elimination via the kidneys and gallbladder, and toxins eliminated with the bile (like heavy metals) are removed from the body more efficiently when there is adequate fiber in the diet. Thus, fiber protects you from environmental toxins and is an essential component of any detoxification program.

Soothing Intestinal Inflammation: Mucilaginous fibers are essential in healing any type of inflammatory bowel disorder (IBD), including ulcerations, Crohn's disease, and colitis. The slimy material they create when hydrated coats the intestinal membranes like the body's own mucus secretions. This soothes irritation and aids healing of the intestinal tissue. In these disorders, people may find foods containing high amounts of roughage irritating to their sensitive intestinal tract, but the smoothage of mucilant herbs is soothing to the GI tract of those suffering from IBD.

Immunity: Mucilant herbs help to feed the friendly intestinal bacteria that are a critical part of the intestinal microflora. In turn, this creates a strong immune system and helps the body ward off infections of all kinds. In addition, mucilage often contains antimicrobial compounds that protect the plant from viruses, bacteria and fungus. Thus many mucilaginous fibers help fight infection, especially on the skin or mucus membranes.

Bowel Health: When taken with adequate amounts of water, mucilaginous fiber will help keep the bowel regular. It can be used to prevent and treat both constipation and diarrhea. In constipation, the fiber swells in water, which moistens the bowel and bulks the stool. This provides the natural stretching of the bowel that triggers elimination. In diarrhea, the fiber helps bind the irritating substances the body is trying to flush out, again bulking the stool in the process, thus relieving watery bowel movements.

Hemorrhoids: Mucilaginous fiber, taken with plenty of water, helps keep the stool soft, which aids the healing of hemorrhoids.

Mild Foods: Many mucilant herbs act as mild, nourishing foods that can help to rebuild health in persons who have been weakened by chronic illness. They don't provide a lot of calories but they often contain significate amounts of nutrients, which the plant also stores within the mucilage.

Topical Application: Mucilant herbs are applied topically to ease burns; soothe red, irritated, and dry skin; and shrink swollen tissue. They are also commonly used in poultices to heal injured tissue.

Major Mucilant Herbs

Here are some of the major mucilant herbs you can use. We've also included a few formulas that feature these herbs.

Aloe Vera

Aloe vera is probably the most well-known mucilant herb, being a popular remedy for burns. The mucilaginous gel from aloe vera soothes and cools sunburn, kitchen burns, and even radiation burns, relieving pain and speeding healing. Applied topically, it is also helpful for any skin damage or irritation where the skin is dry, red, and irritated, including surgical wounds, skin lesions, acute dermatitis, and psoriasis.

Drinking one or two ounces of whole leaf aloe vera juice every day has proven helpful for healing inflammation and irritation of the mucus membranes of the mouth, sinuses, and digestive tract. It is particularly helpful for inflammatory bowel disorders such as ulcerations, colitis, gastritis, and Crohn's disease.

Aloe vera juice not only relieves digestive irritation, it also improves digestion and absorption, reduces bowel toxicity, decreases colon transit time, and promotes a more favorable balance in the intestinal microflora. It reduces yeast and harmful bacteria, while promoting the growth of friendly flora.

It also helps balance the immune system making it helpful for inflammatory and autoimmune diseases like rheumatoid arthritis, osteoarthritis, and even lupus. Aloe vera is antiviral and has been helpful for chronic viral conditions including HIV and Epstein-Barr virus.

Many aloe vera products do not contain the whole juice or gel. Often they are highly diluted in water. Make sure that you get a product that is 100% juiced aloe. Real aloe should have a slight color and a sour, slightly bitter taste.

Comfrey

Comfrey is a valuable mucilant herb for topical use. It soothes irritated tissues and promotes rapid healing of injuries to the skin, including abrasions, burns, minor cuts, and bruises. It contains a cell proliferate called allantoin, which promotes rapid cell growth, causing injuries to heal more quickly. It can be applied as part of a poultice or in a healing salve.

Marshmallow

Marshmallow is a member of the mallow family, which contains many mucilant herbs and foods, including okra, common or cheese mallow, hibiscus, and hollyhock. It is no accident that the herb marshmallow has a name similar to the sugary marshmallows, as the candy was once flavored with this herb.

Marshmallow is a mucilaginous food that contains about 25 to 30 percent starch and about the same amount of mucilage. This makes mallows both nourishing and medicinal, so they can be used as a mild, nourishing food to help someone who has been chronically ill to recover their health.

As an herb, marshmallow is soothing, moistening, and anti-inflammatory, working primarily on the mucus membranes of the digestive, respiratory, and urinary systems. In the gastrointestinal tract, marshmallow is helpful for healing the intestines in leaky gut syndrome and in easing inflammation in inflammatory bowel diseases like ulcers and colitis.

It is also combined with pepsin in a ***Pepsin Intestinal Formula*** to cleanse and heal the small intestines. It is also combined with slippery elm in a ***Intestinal Soothing Formula***, which is excellent for helping bowel afflictions like Crohn's, colitis, celiac, and ulcers.

Marshmallow is an excellent remedy for the lungs when they are dry and irritated. It is a good remedy for a dry, hacking cough, especially when taken with mullein and licorice root.

Marshmallow is also beneficial for the urinary system. It is a mild diuretic and is particularly helpful for soothing burning and scalding urination, especially when combined with cornsilk.

Like other mallows, it can also be used topically to treat swollen tissue and wounds. It has a mild antimicrobial action. It can be used on burns from heat or acidic or alkaline chemicals. It can also be used on other types of skin irritations involving redness and swelling of tissue.

Nopal

The stems of the prickly pear cactus are filled with a mucilaginous substance similar to the gel inside of aloe vera. The pads are not only edible, after the cactus needles have been properly removed, they are also a valuable medicine.

Nopal is helpful for type 2 diabetes and has a very low glycemic index. Single doses have reportedly decreased blood sugar by 17–46 percent in clinical trials. It also contains antioxidants and antimicrobial compounds, which make it anti-inflammatory and antimicrobial. This means it is soothing to the gastrointestinal tract and helps promote a healthy gut flora.

Topically, fresh nopal pulp can be applied for burns and other skin irritations in the same way aloe vera is used. Just make certain to remove all the needles before cutting into the pad.

Psyllium and Plantain

Psyllium is one of the most mucilant herbs available. It comes from the seeds of a species of plantain native to India. The seeds and the husks or hulls of the seeds are both used as over-the-counter bulk laxatives. Psyllium hulls absorb many times their own weight in water, swelling to form a gelatinous mass that bulks and lubricates the stool. Psyllium can be used to relieve both constipation and diarrhea, but is not the best fiber for people with inflammatory bowel diseases.

Psyllium works best when combined with other mucilant herbs and fibers, like apple pectin, oat bran, and guar gum to create a natural ***Fiber Blend Formula***. You mix the Fiber Blend with water or juice (apple or grape works best), stir it until it dissolves, and then drink it quickly before it turns slimy. This is best done first thing in the morning, at least a half hour before breakfast, or in the evening, at least two hours after dinner. It's best to start slowly, with just a half teaspoon and work up to a heaping tablespoon and make sure to drink an extra glass of water when taking psyllium hulls or a Fiber Blend Formula.

Plantain leaves are slightly mucilaginous but are also slightly astringent, having a mild sour flavor. Crushed fresh plantain leaves make an excellent poultice for many types of injuries, including cuts, insect bites and stings, minor burns, rashes, abrasions, and strains. Internally, plantain leaf helps to heal ulcers, inflammatory bowel disorders and leaky gut syndrome.

Seaweeds

Kelp, dulse, Irish moss, and other seaweeds contain mucilaginous compounds. For example, Irish moss contains a mucilaginous fiber called carrageenan, which is widely used as a thickening agent in foods. Kelp contains algin, a mucilaginous fiber that helps the body detoxify from heavy metals. Algin is also used to ease acid reflux.

Seaweeds have a healing influence on the gut, helping to reduce intestinal inflammation and repair leaky gut. They are also beneficial for the skin and are often used in masques and other topical applications to moisten, heal, and nourish the skin. Seaweeds can also be used in baths and soaks. They help the skin to stay soft and moist and can be helpful for healing acne and other skin irritations.

Seaweeds are also rich in trace minerals and other nutrients, including iodine for the thyroid and are often used to boost thyroid activity in Western herbalism. Some even contain small amounts of thyroid hormones.

Seaweeds are used in traditional Chinese medicine (TCM) to resolve tissue swelling or hardened masses in the body, such as swollen lymph nodes, cysts, and abscesses. They help to soften hard swollen tissues. They are also helpful for lung problems where

Continued on page 4

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Continued from page 3

the lungs are dry and there is hardened mucus that needs to be eliminated.

Seaweeds are also used for cancer in TCM. Many of them contain lignans, which are also found in flaxseeds, and are known to bond to estrogen-receptor sites and inhibit estrogen-dependent cancers. Fucoidan, a compound found in kelp and bladderwrack, helps prevent the spread of cancer and also interferes with viruses. This means seaweeds have also been helpful for chronic viral infections like herpes.

Slippery Elm

The inner bark of the slippery elm tree is credited with saving George Washington's starving army during their bitter winter in Valley Forge. The men are said to have eaten nothing but a gruel made from this bark for twelve days straight.

Slippery elm is a wonderful mucilant herb that is also a nourishing food that is completely safe for anyone, including young children. It has helped infants with diarrhea or failure to thrive and has also served as a regenerating food for people who are debilitated by chronic illnesses like cancer. It is also a useful remedy for diarrhea in children.

In the gastrointestinal tract, slippery elm is helpful for healing inflammatory bowel disorders like Crohn's and ulcerative colitis, especially when a person experiences alternating bouts of diarrhea and constipation. It is a key ingredient in a ***Intestinal Soothing Formula***, mentioned under Marshmallow and is also the principle ingredient in a ***Irritable Bowel Fiber Formula***, a gentle fiber blend suitable for sensitive GI tracts. This fiber blend also contains flax seed, marshmallow, and cat's claw bark and helps to soothe intestinal irritation and heal leaky gut. It works particularly well when combined with a ***Gentle Bowel Cleansing Formula***, which contains magnesium, triphala, and yellow dock root. These two formulas are a great way to aid elimination in pregnant women, nursing mothers, the elderly, or anyone else who can't tolerate course fiber or stimulant laxatives.

Slippery elm has a mild, slightly sweet flavor, which means it can be taken internally by children and people who have trouble swallowing capsules. Simply mix it with a food like applesauce, yogurt, or oatmeal and eat it. It doesn't readily dissolve in liquids like psyllium, but you can use a blender to mix it with juice. You can also blend it with some warm milk or a milk substitute and a little sweetener (e.g. honey, molasses, xylitol) to make a fairly pleasant drink. Like other fibers, it's best to drink or consume it fairly quickly so it doesn't become too slimy to take.

Slippery elm is one of the best herbs to use as a base for making poultices, combining well with plantain, marshmallow, comfrey and other vulneraries to speed the healing of burns, skin inflammations, boils, and other irritations. It can also be taken internally to aid the healing of broken bones, sprains, and other injuries.

Getting the Smoothage You Need

To protect the health of your bowel, reduce the level of toxicity in your body, and obtain the many other benefits of water soluble fiber, start including more fruits and vegetables in your diet. To make sure you get the smoothage you need, start taking a Fiber Blend Formula or the Irritable Bowel Fiber Formula daily, along with a glass or two of water. This simple practice can do wonders for your overall health.

Additional Help and Information

For more information about the benefits of fiber and mucilaginous herbs contact the person who gave you this newsletter. You can also consult the following resources:

Strategies for Healing by Steven Horne
The Modern Herbal Dispensatory by Steven Horne and Thomas Easley
The Earthwise Herbal by Matthew Wood
The Encyclopedia of Herbal Medicine by Andrew Chevallier
https://science.sciencemag.org/content/357/6353/802