



Hot Belly Diet: A 30 day Metabolic Transformation

1. Why is our weak digestive system to blame for our weight gain and chronic exhaustion?

Clearly, Weak Digestive Fire is responsible for low energy, body-weight chaos, digestive disorders, poor sleep, headaches, congestion, low libido, low-grade depression, anxiety, burnout, and signs of ongoing inflammation such as sore joints or relentless allergies. The irony in all this is that many of these people are indeed active—they lead healthy lifestyles and yet fail to experience optimal health at a healthy weight. Well, the reason is that these myriad conditions actually have a surprising common denominator: a weak digestive “fire.” If you don’t keep your digestive fires burning cleanly, you cannot lose weight permanently or achieve the vibrant health you’ve always dreamed of. In Ayurveda, a healthy digestive system is seen as a cornerstone of well-being; as such, disease and disorder are believed to arise from inefficient digestion. In fact, we can even distill the science of Ayurveda down to the simple idea that total health resides in the state of our digestive powers, and that restoring health must originate with a focus on our digestive system. Your digestive fire simply refers to your body’s metabolism—the process of turning nutrients from food into energy for cells to sustain life, which, of course, is commandeered by your digestion, a complex combination of biological and chemical interactions.

How can you reverse the digestive fire in your belly?

The ingredients that make for a strong digestion and fast metabolism or “fire” include **Four chief components:**

1. Eating specific foods and drinking certain hot liquids that feed and fuel your metabolism rather than slow it down, ultimately supporting digestive balance and efficiency.
2. Fasting in between meals (no snacking), for the sensation of hunger is essential to weight loss and overall health. New science shows that intermittent fasting can help you live a longer, healthier life.
3. Making lunch the most important meal of the day (i.e., eating when the sun is burning brightest). Studies now prove that eating more calories midday can result in greater weight loss, and that late lunches and big dinners can be detrimental to weight-loss efforts and general health—even if the total calories consumed in a day are the same.
4. Clearing out “digestive sludge”—residue from poorly digested food that antagonizes weight loss, provokes hormonal imbalances, and ultimately triggers inflammation, the root



cause of virtually all disease. This sludge also includes toxins that cannot be cleared by the body effectively due to a weak metabolism and debilitated digestive organs such as the pancreas and liver. Research now shows that these toxins, which are created by the body during normal metabolism, can trigger weight gain and impede weight-loss efforts. Removing this sludge, however, is like clearing dust and ashes from a used fireplace to get the logs to burn stronger and cleaner the next time.

Contrary to most diet and weight loss plans, you believe we should only eat when we are hungry. Why?

Most Americans have never experienced true hunger. We are overfed and undernourished. Several times a week, I correct someone for saying a version of the following: “But I thought it was important to stay semi-full throughout the day and graze on multiple meals rather than three large ones. Doesn’t this keep the metabolism humming? Isn’t it healthy to spread out my calories throughout the day and eat constantly?”

Quite the contrary: The more meals you eat, no matter how small (snacks included), the smaller your digestive fire will be.

Of all the lessons I teach, one of the most important one goes against conventional dieting wisdom that says you should “never wait until you’re hungry to eat.” This is perhaps one of the most harmful pieces of advice out there in diet circles. Hunger is a vital marker of health. Appetite is your friend, not your enemy. It’s imperative to experience a healthy sense of hunger between meals; one needs to prepare the body to receive food. People who graze all day and never get truly hungry are sapping their digestive fire. Think about it: If you’re slowly putting fuel inside your body when you don’t need it, excess fuel will get stored (as fat) and that digestive sludge or “ama” as we say in Ayurveda will begin to build. The fire begins to act more like smoldering embers rather than a hot flame.

What is the importance of Digestive Fire from a preventive and wellness point of view?

Digestive fire, or “agni,” is one of the most important, core principles in Ayurveda. Broadly speaking, it refers to your ability to process all aspects of life, including tangible things like food and drink to memories and even sensorial experiences. More specifically, your digestive fire is the collection of digestive processes that are required to convert food into high-quality tissues and energy for cells. And those processes involve all the digestive juices, hormonal secretions, enzymes, and the activity that are needed to get the body’s cylinders firing. (In fact, the words *ignite* and *ignition* come from the Sanskrit word agni. There are in fact a total of thirteen different agnis presiding over our metabolic functions. Any biochemical process or reaction in





the body relates to agni. And in the bigger picture, agni is viewed as the creative force of intelligence that resides in all life.)

If we were to use more modern, technical terms, we'd say that your digestive fire is simply the body's fund of digestive enzymes, acids, biochemicals, hormones, and other substances it needs to properly metabolize foods so they can be broken down into usable parts, transported into destination cells, and carried to various areas of the body to conduct chores essential to keeping you alive. It's located within the lower stomach and small intestine, but finds its way throughout the entire body to preside over life-sustaining processes.

Although agni literally means fire, in the body it can be compared to your metabolism. It's responsible for absorbing the essential nutrients the body needs while burning off waste products. And if this critical part is functioning effectively, the whole body will be nourished, full of life and vitality. If our agni is strong, we build healthy appetites, and digest food efficiently. Agni gives our organs the strength to work optimally, and our minds emotional stability, clarity, and resilience.

I realize that I'm not using scientific terms that you're probably used to reading about in the media or modern health journals, but we can easily translate this philosophy to today's vocabulary. The body contains many types of agni. In your the digestive system, for example, agni determines the production of hydrochloric acid in the stomach and sugar-digesting enzymes in the pancreas. It also regulates the thyroid gland and the metabolic changes in tissues from various signals in the body. Each cell has special agnis that work at a molecular level. So we can say that the metabolic pathway of agni begins with digestion and ends in the cells.

When you have a weak digestive fire, you create Ama (Digestive impurities, tissue sludge), What is Ama? How does it create Disease?

Ayurveda identifies four main states of agni: balanced, irregular, sharp, and weak. When our agni is balanced, it ensures proper nourishment, energy levels, regular elimination, strong immunity, a clear complexion, excellent circulation, and overall strength and vitality.

On the other hand, if our agni is weak, we can't digest efficiently, creating toxic residue, or *ama*, that gets trapped in our bodies. Ama is considered the root cause of disease. And its accumulation leads to a slow deterioration of the body. It also incapacitates our ability to process emotions, which in turn creates more toxic residue. For this reason, repressed anger, ongoing sadness, and chronic guilt are often seen in Ayurveda as being more debilitating than problems with physical digestion.



If the sweet nectars of the body are water and blood, then ama is the gunk that impairs our ability to digest food. Undigested and partially digested food lingers, leading to the formation of this intestinal sludge that plugs up not only the intestines, but also other vital pathways, such as blood vessels and the movement of hormones in the body. As ama undergoes a multitude of chemical changes that wind up creating toxins in the bloodstream, it ultimately allows these toxins to accumulate in the weaker parts of the body, where they disrupt organs and cripple the immune system's powers. Eventually the end result is a disease state, which can manifest as heart disease, cancer, or an autoimmune disorder, among other ailments.

Ama is one of the most menacing barriers to good health. And here's the problem with virtually all diet systems currently on the market: They focus on calorie restriction through foods that merely perpetuate this intestinal swampland—causing serious buildup on our insides that antagonizes weight maintenance and can even lead to conditions such as irritable bowel syndrome, food allergies, celiac disease, and, as I just mentioned, cancer. The statistics tell the story: As we've witnessed a radical shift in the quality of our food supply coupled with our "toxic hunger" for anemic food found in processed and packaged products, we've simultaneously witnessed a dramatic increase in chronic conditions and diseases that can be linked back to this notion of ama.

Another way of looking at ama is to consider it the residual, poorly digested food particles like undigested proteins, excess sugars, and fats that get into the bloodstream and wreak metabolic havoc, triggering hormonal disturbances such as blood-sugar imbalances, insulin resistance, and, at the extreme, diabetes and other serious conditions. It can be recognized today as high cholesterol, hypertension, and digestive disorders such as acute constipation and/or diarrhea, among other health challenges. Although there is no equivalent in Western medicine to ama, it's well documented and widely accepted that toxins typically originate in the digestive tract. While some toxins, called *exogenous* toxins, can enter our body directly from the foods we eat (e.g., pesticides, herbicides, and antibiotic-treated meat and poultry), most are *endogenous*—a normal outcome of our body's digestive and metabolic processes as we turn nutrients from food into energy for cellular life. But if any of these toxins are not properly dealt with and neutralized, they can be harmful. Ama first accumulates in the colon and small intestine and then travels throughout the body via the blood. Put simply, ama creates toxic breeding grounds and acts as a precursor to disease.

What is the connection between digestive system and Nervous system, immune health, microbiome etc?

If you've ever had food poisoning, you know your gut is your first line of defense. When a nasty microbe is mistakenly consumed, the gut quickly recognizes the intruder and leaps into action. But to identify the culprit, it must call upon millions of immune system cells residing in its walls that are at the ready for war. For this reason, as I mentioned, the gut plays a major role in



immunity, helping to differentiate between what is harmless and what is harmful. Every day, you introduce pounds of foreign material in the form of sustenance into your gut. The immune system is like a gatekeeper; it has to decide what is okay to let through and what is not. And it doesn't like to be fooled.

This extraordinary system gets going the day you enter the world. At birth, your gastrointestinal tract was entirely free of bacteria, but moments thereafter it began to be colonized—thereby creating your personal *microbiome*. And during the first few years of life, your gut developed a unique tribe of bacterial species whose characteristics were determined by a variety of factors, including genetics, diet, hygiene, geography, medication use, and even the tribes of bacteria colonizing people around you. And because these microbes take up residence on the delicate folds of your intestinal walls, they help create a physical barrier against potential invaders such as bad bacteria (pathogenic flora), viruses, and parasites. The intestinal flora also have a role in preventing infections and combating many toxins that make it down into your intestines. The good bacteria also digest part of your food. Just as microorganisms in the soils of a forest help break down fallen fruit to return nutrients to the plants and trees, your gut's microorganisms are charged with aiding in the extraction of essential nutrients from foods so that they can be absorbed across the intestinal wall and into the bloodstream for delivery to cells and tissues. Without these bacteria, you'd be at a loss for transporting many nutrients, which explains why a depletion of healthy gut flora pretty much guarantees nutrient depletion and its consequences, system malfunction.

How does Re-Kindling Fire Re-Kindles your Life?

We all appreciate the pleasure and happiness of good health. Without it, life isn't the same. And since having a roaring, "hot" digestive fire is at the heart of achieving optimal wellness, then when we learn how to re-ignite a dull or dying fire we can effectively rekindle everything else about us and get back feeling youthful, vibrant, and full of promise.

Top 10 Ancient secrets for a lively digestive fire

1. *Avoid eating in between meals* (no snacking; let your hunger—and fire—build)
2. *Sip warm fluids* (avoid cold and carbonated drinks; drinking just hot water throughout the day will stoke your digestive fire, improve digestion, and help prevent the accumulation of ama)
3. *Sit down to eat, chew well, and avoid passive entertainment while you eat* (no TV, computer, or even reading)
4. *Make lunch the most important (biggest) meal of the day* (eat like a king during the day, and a pauper at night); digestion is strongest at midday; avoid heavy dinners (think brothy soups and light salads)



5. *Spice it up!* Add spices to your meals like fresh ginger, cumin, black pepper, turmeric, and fenugreek. These contain properties that will enhance your digestion and weight loss goals.
6. *Eat less, live longer.* Watch your portions (skip the second or third helping and push away from the table before you reach maximum fullness).
7. *Eat foods filled with Prana ("life");* no processed, packaged or even reheated/leftover foods. Avoid bad but popular combinations that will weaken your fire: milk with meat, fish, eggs, bananas, yogurt, and sour fruits; eggs with milk, meat, fish, yogurt, cheese, fruits or beans; fresh fruits with any other foods (eat them alone but avoid eating fresh fruit as dessert)
8. *Respect the 24-hour solar day:* Time your meals to maximize your body's inherent preferences for turning on its digestive fire. The ideal schedule:
 Breakfast between 7:00 and 8:00 a.m. Don't eat a lot of food after 9:00 a.m.
 Lunch (largest and most important meal of the day) between noon and 1:00 p.m.
 Dinner (which should consist of a light meal) before 7:00 p.m. Avoid ever being wakeful between 10 pm and 2:00 am— Immune Function
Fast a few times a year, or at least once a season ("detox on the equinox"): four different fasting protocols—from least to most vigorous—entail the following:
 - a. Consuming light, easily digestible foods only, such as khichadi, soupy broths, and warm herbal teas.
 - b. Eating fruits, vegetables, or fresh juices only.
 - c. Avoiding solid foods and drinking water or herbal teas.
 - d. Avoiding both food and water (limit to twenty-four hours).
9. *Pursue your passions and live to the fullest of your unique self:* Strive to align your goals and values with your talents and passions in a job that supports your livelihood, and allows you to feel appreciated and needed in the world at large. And don't forget to make room for fun and laughter in whatever job you pursue. The act of laughter itself will make you feel lighter and heighten your sense of awareness. A belly full of laughs is a hot belly indeed.
10. *Enjoy Hunger, Live Longer:* Intermittent Fasting is the key to long and healthy life. Remember to Eat Less and Eat Right.