

## New Year's resolution: focus on your insides

Written by Holyoke Enterprise

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Every New Year millions of people vow to get fit and improve their health by joining a gym and following a healthier diet. Unfortunately, many overlook an essential part of overall health and wellness—the digestive system.

When the digestive system is out of balance, you are vulnerable to experiencing occasional digestive upsets which can slow you down and make you feel sluggish and unhealthy.

Registered dietitian and Align spokesperson, Ashley Koff, offers these tips because with the right balance of nutrition, exercise and bacteria you can work towards a healthier 2010:

—Mind your manners: Talking while eating, chewing gum and drinking through a straw can all cause one to swallow excess air, leaving an uncomfortable feeling.

—Great things do come in small packages: Allow yourself to enjoy the occasional treat, but limit it to just a taste or bite. The smaller portion will be better for the digestive system and can help one feel less bloated.

—Find your inner balance: of bacteria, that is. It's important to have a good balance of beneficial bacteria (probiotics) in the digestive systems; not enough can lead to digestive imbalance. When used daily as directed, a probiotic supplement can help restore the natural balance and provide ongoing probiotic protection from occasional digestive upsets.

—How sweet it is: Keep this in mind the next time reaching for a treat this year. Sugars, dried fruit, sweeteners and juice are treats that may not be friendly to all digestive systems. Carbonated drinks like sugary sodas can make the stomach feel puffy and distended. Keep it simple—stick to water with lemon or herbal tea.

—UNDERwhelm the digestive system: How do we calm irritability? Take a few things off the plate—literally. When we eat and drink less at one time, we present less to the digestive system.

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—Don't feel weighed down: Hop on the treadmill, hit the dance floor or just run around with the nieces and nephews—anything. Working up a sweat releases fluids the body might be holding, and exercising each day can help to move food along the digestive tract. Before beginning a new exercise program or regimen, though, talk to a doctor to see what kind of activity is right.

For the coming year, there are many small changes one can make to look and feel great, including finding smart ways to protect against occasional digestive upsets.