

Why Food Enzymes are Important

by Howard F. Loomis Jr., D.C.



Plant enzymes are important because they are capable of digesting food before the body's own digestive process begins. In other words, plant enzymes can enhance the digestion of food and the delivery of nutrients to the blood even if you have a compromised digestive system. The same cannot be said of animal enzymes such as pancreatin.

Everyone agrees that proper nutrition is crucial to the maintenance of a healthy body. However, most healthcare practitioners overlook the true cause of many nutritional disorders. It is assumed, quite mistakenly, that digestion occurs automatically and the correction of a nutritional disorder simply requires matching the right nutritional supplement to the condition. For example, vitamin C for colds, vitamin A for viruses and herbal laxatives for constipation. While this treatment may relieve patient symptoms, the relief is only temporary because the underlying problem of faulty digestion is ignored. Healthcare practitioners who want to effectively manage health problems that are related to nutritional imbalances must consider each person's ability to digest food. Unfortunately, most clinicians give little or no thought to the role of enzymes in digestion, despite overwhelming evidence of their importance.

Enzymes are present in all living animal and plant cells. They are the primary motivators of all natural biochemical processes. Life cannot exist without enzymes because they are essential components of every chemical reaction in the body. For example, they are the only substance that can digest food and make it small enough to pass through the gastrointestinal mucosa into the bloodstream. Three very broad classifications of enzymes are:

1. Food enzymes - occur in raw food and, when present in the diet, begin the process of digestion
2. Digestive enzymes - produced by the body to break food into particles small enough to be carried across the gut wall
3. Metabolic enzymes - produced by the body to perform various complex biochemical reactions

In the 1930s, Edward Howell, MD, the food enzyme pioneer, found that there is a difference between plant enzymes and those that are produced by the body. He was convinced that plant enzymes in food and supplements have a different function in human digestion than that of the body's own digestive enzymes. With this theory, he began isolating and concentrating plant enzymes from their sources. He found the difference is that food enzymes begin digesting food in the stomach and will work for at least one hour before the body's digestive system begins to work. For this reason, enzymes should be considered essential nutrients. Unfortunately, this is not the case, and food manufacturers are removing them from food to gain shelf-life.

Dr. Howell was particularly impressed by the way the ingestion of raw food slowed the progress of chronic degenerative diseases and spent his professional life postulating and then validating his theories.

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