

I Digest, Therefore I am

by Rafael Mendez

There are flavors you don't just taste on your tongue, you feel them in your stomach and your memory. Eat a tea-soaked madeleine, and suddenly you're back in your childhood kitchen; a scent, and a long-forgotten memory emerge; and your body fills with an emotion that isn't from today, but from your youth.

Eating well is evoking. Eating is remembering because taste isn't just physical pleasure, it's an emotional experience. It's cellular memory. It's the past that re-emerges. In those moments, we understand that the body is conscious. The digestive system isn't just a chain of organs; it's an emotional system, a human system. Eating doesn't begin when you swallow. It starts when you see, smell, and touch the food. When the body, before swallowing it, anticipates, desires, and enjoys.

Remember that each meal can either be an automatic gesture or an experience. We can choose to connect with our body that feels, digests, and transforms. With our body that more than eats, it nourishes. Food enters through the mouth, but doesn't stay there. It begins a fantastic voyage: it moves across the tongue where taste sends signals to the brain, traverses the pharynx and esophagus, and arrives in the stomach, which doesn't just break it down but dialogues with the nervous system. Finally, it goes through the intestine, which decides what stays as nutrients and what goes as waste.

The digestive system is a place of bodily intelligence because digesting isn't just absorbing nutrients. It's interpreting, filtering, and making decisions biologically that directly influence your emotional and cognitive well-being. Before food reaches the intestine, brain regions are already activated, and your body can change how it digests depending on whether you are eating calmly or anxiously. This isn't just physiology, it's embodied awareness. Your manner in which you eat reveals how you relate to yourself: the rush to swallow, the tension as you chew, and the attention you give to eating are all part of how the body processes life.

Eating is a biological necessity that embodies self-care and self-knowledge. Each time you pay attention to the journey of food within you, you're also paying attention to who you are being in that moment. The body doesn't lie. You must be attentive. Previously, it was thought that the intestine was just a tube, a passageway, a site of digestion. Today, we know it's much more. The intestine is an intelligent organ; it chooses what to digest, it filters, communicates, and affects how we feel. There are more neurons in the intestine than in the entire spinal cord, and it produces a large part of the serotonin that regulates your mood. The intestine reacts, communicates, and senses. Inside it exists an entire universe, the gut microbiota: millions of bacteria that aid digestion, regulate the immune system, contribute to neurotransmitter production, and affect the way we make decisions.

Blood glucose and executive function in our brain are tightly linked. The prefrontal cortex, your deliberation and impulse-control center, is a relentless consumer of glucose. Studies on court judges, parole boards, and even shoppers show that decision quality degrades measurably as time since the last meal increases. But it's not just whether you ate, but what you ate.

Big ups and downs in blood sugar might matter more than the overall number. A high-sugar meal spikes glucose fast, then crashes. That crash correlates with irritability, risk aversion, and poor working memory. A slower-release meal (proteins, complex carbohydrates, fats) maintains more stable prefrontal function for longer. So two people who both "ate breakfast" may be in very different cognitive states by 10 am.

The gut-brain axis adds a layer most people underestimate. The enteric nervous system contains roughly 100 million neurons and produces about 95% of the body's serotonin. What you eat shapes your microbiome, which influences neurotransmitter availability, which influences mood, motivation, and risk tolerance, all inputs to decision-making.

Eating isn't an isolated act; it's a conversation with our environment, our cells, and our emotional history. This is why eating matters calmly; why what you choose to eat matters; how you chew, breathe, and feel while eating matters. Our intestinal system isn't passive; it's constantly deciding: "Does this nourish or harm? Does it support or attack me? Can I integrate this, or do I release it?" And with each response, a bit of our health, balance, and emotional well-being is determined. Our digestive system will be heard. The body doesn't keep everything it receives; it selects, transforms, and releases. That is digestion: keeping what nourishes and letting go of what doesn't. It can be a great ally if you support it.

Beyond the biological, there's a life lesson to appreciate: the body attempts not to retain what harms it. It attempts to move it, expel it, let it go. Yet, we hold on to emotions that poison us, thoughts that sabotage us, relationships that inflame us. Just as the intestine filters, you can too: We need to ask ourselves, "Can I integrate this, or is it time to let it pass?"

Conscious awareness happens only in our heads. The way we experience is also shaped by what we eat and how we digest. Certain foods inflame. When you're inflamed, you're irritable. When you nourish your body, your mind sharpens. Eating well doesn't fuel a separate system; it supports the unified organism. The body isn't a vessel for the mind; it *is* the mind in another form. The digestive system, in its silent complexity, influences our perception, emotional state, and mental clarity. That's why every time you eat with awareness, every time you listen to your stomach, your digestion, you're also caring for your mind and creating your experience. Thinking is the processing of selecting and transforming, just as the body does with each bite. That's why it's important to be mindful of how we digest: be calm and attentive, keeping what nourishes, letting go of what stagnates. We aren't head on top and body below. We are a full presence, one complex living organism. As the saying goes, we are what and how we eat. Choose to nourish yourself with awareness.