

# **How to Identify and Resolve Your Child's Digestive Issues**

**Sheila Kilbane, MD**



## How to Identify and Resolve Your Child's Digestive Issues

**Rebekah Kelley:** Welcome to the Humanized podcast, all about personalizing your health. I'm your host, Rebekah Kelley, and today we'll be discussing How to Identify and Resolve your Child's Digestive Issues, with Dr. Sheila Kilbane. Before I introduce Dr. Kilbane, I want to remind everyone to subscribe and get all the variety of casts in audio, video and transcription at [HumanizedHealth.com](https://HumanizedHealth.com). I'd also like to thank our lead sponsor, Village Green Apothecary, at [MyVillageGreen.com](https://MyVillageGreen.com).

So, a little bit about Dr. Sheila Kilbane. She is a board certified pediatrician who specializes in integrative medicine. She uses the best of traditional and integrative medicine to find the root cause of illness. Using her 7-step process along with natural nutritional therapies, Dr. Kilbane helps families significantly improve or resolve altogether illnesses such as colic, reflux, eczema, ear and sinus infections, asthma, allergies, and stomach and GI issues such as constipation and abdominal pain. She also conducts online education classes in addition to seeing individual patients in Charlotte, North Carolina, it's always a pleasure, Dr. Kilbane. Thanks for being with us again.

**Sheila Kilbane:** Absolutely. I love chatting with you.

**Rebekah Kelley:** So, I just want to jump right in there. We know that many children today have digestive issues. Can you talk about what are the main factors that contribute to this? What are these physical stressors, or things that are impacting digestion for kids?

**Sheila Kilbane:** Yeah. So the first thing I want to say is that we're seeing digestive issues more and more and earlier on. Babies are coming in with this. So it's a real problem and it's definitely increasing. When we're learning about digestion, when we're in medical school, we're learning the nuts and bolts. We're learning about the gallbladder and the pancreas. And we don't really tie it together with what's happening in the real world when we're treating patients. We think about digestive enzymes, for example. What we learn about the pancreas is that you can get pancreatitis and it's pretty rare and that's very painful because the pancreas is what secretes our enzymes, which help break down our food. I've studied it in such a different way and in so much more depth doing functional and integrative medicine.

Breaking down our food is extremely important to being able to digest and absorb our nutrients. So when it comes to proteins, proteins are what make up our neuro-transmitters, which help us be able to focus in school. They help us fall asleep. They help us stay asleep. When it comes to fats, fats are what create our hormones. They create our cell walls. Because we're using a lot of things these days, we're using a lot of prescription medications to help increase or decrease or modulate hormones and neurotransmitters. We have many, many kids on stimulants. We have many girls, so many young girls are being put on oral contraceptive medications to balance out their hormones.

## How to Identify and Resolve Your Child's Digestive Issues

So we really want to go back to digestion. And other signs of digestive issues are going to be, what does the stool look like? What does our skin look like? Do we have a lot of rough patches, red patches? The skin is a really good window to the gut. Dark circles under the eyes. Do we have anemia? Is iron low? Are we not absorbing enough iron from our system? Are we eating enough iron?

So when we're looking at all of those things, and we're looking at what things impact digestion, stress is a biggie. And if we're living in that fight-or-flight, which a lot of us do, right? We're running from activity to activity. Even during the pandemic, things have been very stressful because we can't get out and do anything, right? We need that balance somewhere. And when we're in the stress state, our body, our blood shunts. So, our blood shunts away from our digestive track, where we do our digesting and it gets shunted to our arms and our legs so that we can run away from the lion, the proverbial lion in the forest that never actually comes. And so getting into that relaxed state is what brings our blood flow back to our stomach and our GI track, where we're able to digest our food. And that's called the parasympathetic side of our nervous system. We want that more active.

Chewing is another thing, right? How many kids sit to the table and they barely even chew and they're just swallowing. So that's going to impact our digestion.

Poor quality foods. We've got an epidemic of processed, packaged, high sugar, high fat, high carbohydrate food. Those things create inflammation in our gut, which is going to impact the enzymes in our gut, the ability for those to work properly.

Inflammation, which I just mentioned. If we've got a lot of inflammation, which is... Inflammation is when our body is sending extra white blood cells to certain areas. We need that sometimes. Like if you sprain an ankle, you need inflammation to go to that area. But what's happening is, because we're walking around with too many processed, packaged foods, too much stress, a lot of toxins, a lot of things that we're being exposed to, we've got a lot more inflammation, including in our gut. So that will impact digestion.

Recurrent illnesses. Medication. So if you've got a child, who's had a lot of ear infections or sinus infections, they've been on a lot of antibiotics. The antibiotics are killing that bacteria in the ears or the lungs, but it's also killing the good healthy bacteria in the gut. So we need to be cognizant of that. If we're on a lot of steroids, maybe we have asthma, that is going to impact the gut. A lot of adults are on antacid medications, which are going to impact our digestion.

Another thing is poor quality sleep. So getting into good, deep restorative sleep is crucial. And we were talking about Rebekah's Oura Ring that she wears. There are more devices that you can use now and there things that you can use to help, but we always go back to common sense, right? We want a good, dark room. We want to have the same routine. You want to turn

## How to Identify and Resolve Your Child's Digestive Issues

screens off at least an hour ahead of time. I'd love for kids not to do screens during the week, outside of school, if at all possible.

The other thing is lack of physical activity. Nothing, nothing that we can do recreates what exercise does for our bodies. I was going to say nothing in a bottle. You know, there is no pill. There's nothing that can recreate that increase in blood flow, that heart rate, the respiratory rate, the endorphin release that helps us feel good. It's extremely important for our digestion.

And then aging. Of course, we won't talk about ourselves here, but as we age our digestive enzymes, our digestive capabilities decrease.

And then our genetics, some people have really strong, robust genetics. I always call it the "guts of steel," and other people... I'm somebody who has more of a sensitive GI tract. So I don't ever travel without having my enzymes with me, my probiotics, and on a daily basis, especially if I'm going to eat foods that I maybe don't normally eat, or if I'm eating out at a restaurant.

So those are the main things that are going to affect digestion. And then the other thing that I would love... Does all that make sense, Rebekah, before I move on?

**Rebekah Kelley:** I love it. It makes perfect sense. And I love how you're giving the example of, if you don't stop and allow your parasympa, parasympa... Why can I not say that word? Para... you know what I'm trying to say.

**Sheila Kilbane:** Parasympathetic!

**Rebekah Kelley:** Thank you! [Laughs] If you don't allow that to actually... your child be able to sit and be calm and they're moving while they're eating dinner, then they don't have the benefit of that opportunity to have that moment of digestion. I love how you're showing the cause and effect. Because I think sometimes, with parents, you're trying to get stuff done. Right? You're trying to let kids... but you've got to think about, well, what does this affect? How is this affecting the child? Right? And I love how you're giving the cause and effect. Because I even know that. I know I need to stop and have a meal, but sometimes I'll grab it on the go because I'm in a hurry. And even I can do that to myself. Then I know I don't digest so well. So I love the cause and effect.

Now, is there a way though that we can identify maybe some issues before they become problems? Because I know you mentioned some things about looking at your skin, you also mentioned, I have to say it, "what the poop," right? [Laughs] There's something that's going on. And we were just talking about the Bristol...

**Sheila Kilbane:** The Bristol Stool Chart.

**Rebekah Kelley:** Right. Can you talk about that?

**Sheila Kilbane:** I would love to, it's one of my favorite things to talk about. So, in my practice, all day long we talk about poop, because this is the best way to identify what's going on with our GI tract. And all of you out there, you can Google the Bristol Stool Chart, you can get my book, *Healthy Kids, Happy Moms*, it's anywhere books are sold. I've got a great Bristol Stool Chart in it, and it identifies where we are. What we want to have is a sausage or a snake-like stool. That's what we're looking out for. And then we, if we're looking at hard pellets, or on the other end of the spectrum, they might be loose. It might be like pudding, it might be too loose. One of my families, the mom took a picture of it from my book and she blew it up and she's got it in the bathroom because it's really important, especially for some kids [who] don't love to talk about this. So she's got it in the picture form so he doesn't have to even talk about it, but he just can point each time he goes. And that's more of an extreme case. We don't have to do that every time. But your kids will know exactly if you show them the picture, they'll know where they are on the chart. And it's kind of... it's a fun way to look at it and super, super helpful. And our stools are, especially toddlers, the young kids, when they're eating quickly, when they're eating a lot of sugar, if they're drinking a lot of juice, their stools are going to be on the looser side. You may even see undigested particles of food. That is never normal. And that's why we want to make some changes. We want to slow things down, add in the enzymes. Make sure that the kids are chewing, decrease the sugar in the diet and get to where we have those nice sausages or those nice snake-like stool. [Both laugh]

**Rebekah Kelley:** I also like though, that – I'm sorry I'm laughing – I also like that this is also teaching self-awareness, right? Like, cause and effect to your children, and helping them start to begin to be sensitive and to personalize their health by identifying there's a cause and effect, and what can they do to adapt and address. I like that aspect.

**Sheila Kilbane:** For sure. And we also want to talk about, how does it hurt when they go to the bathroom? Because it shouldn't hurt, and when you have a bowel movement, it should take you about the same amount of time it takes you to urinate. It shouldn't be a huge foul-smelling event and you shouldn't have to use a half a roll of toilet paper to wipe. And I've seen now they sell... that people buy baby diaper wipes when they're going to the bathroom. And I'm like, you're not eating the right food if you've got to have a baby diaper wipe to wipe your bottom. So it shouldn't ... if you look at a cat or a dog, they just go and they don't have to wipe.

**Rebekah Kelley:** They're doing it the right way, apparently.

**Sheila Kilbane:** Exactly, exactly. So that should be a minimal part of it. You can really look around your kid's bottom, and it shouldn't have a red ring around it. That [would] mean they're probably eating some food that isn't right for their system.

## How to Identify and Resolve Your Child's Digestive Issues

**Rebekah Kelley:** Wow. Thank you, Dr. Sheila, this is a very illuminating [both laugh] podcast. Dr. Kilbane can be found at [SheilaKilbane.com](http://SheilaKilbane.com). I'm going to spell that. S H E I L A K I L B A N E.com. And also, she's got her book out, so check that out. And let me remind you to subscribe and get access to all Humanized videos, podcasts and transcriptions from all of our thought leaders on personalized health at [HumanizedHealth.com](http://HumanizedHealth.com).

Thank you so much for being with us. We really appreciate it.

**Sheila Kilbane:** You are welcome. Thank you.