

## Ep #46: Digestive Reset



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**Susi Hately**

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## Ep #46: Digestive Reset

**Male Announcer:** You're listening to *From Pain to Possibility* with Susi Hately. You will hear Susi's best ideas on how to reduce or even eradicate your pain and learn how to listen to your body when it whispers so you don't have to hear it scream. And now here's your host, Susi Hately.

With this episode, I'm delighted to introduce you to Mona Warner. Mona is a longtime friend. She's a trainer within my IAYT yoga therapy program. She's trained with me at the therapeutic yoga intensive level. And every single person I have ever referred to her has loved her, 100% of the time. So whether they're a trainee, a client, or a friend, they all love Mona. So I am delighted to be able to share Mona with you in this episode on digestive reset.

Now let me give you her bio about herself so you can get a run up of who Mona is in a very short bio. Mona Warner is a warm and joyful educator practicing both yoga and Ayurveda. She works at the Janati Yoga Studio in Kingston, Ontario, where she strives to guide others down the path of health, happiness, and wellbeing every day.

She is a national Ayurvedic Medical Association recognized Ayurvedic yoga therapist and certified Ayurvedic practitioner. She's the author of *Ayurvedic Yoga*, *Ayurveda's three pillars of health*, and the *grief and Ayurveda workbook*. Mona shares her home with her wonderful husband, enthusiastic dog, and Ninja kitten. So I am delighted to share Mona with you.

Just a couple notes on the recording. Initially, about the first seven minutes there are very small little points where one part of a word got cut off, there was something in the connection that wasn't caught. It's not horrible, you probably won't even catch it, but those of you who can tune your ear, I just want to warn you after the seven-minute mark it is super clear all the way through. So enjoy this episode with Mona.

## Ep #46: Digestive Reset

Susi: Welcome and I am delighted to be talking about another Ayurvedic concept that I have grown such an incredible fondness to. And this builds upon the episode I did last week on Abhyanga and this one is on digestive reset. And with me today, I have Mona Warner. And Mona and I go way back. But currently, and I'll let her explain a bit more about her story, but currently she is the trainer in my IAYT accredited yoga therapy program, certification program, and she's our Ayurvedic trainer.

And she has been a really great resource for our trainees as well as myself, integrating Ayurvedic concepts in a way that makes a lot of sense. So I'm super excited to be bringing the concept of digestive reset to you guys because there could be a lot of misnomers and myths about digestive reset and the Ayurvedic way of doing it. So I want to dig right in.

Mona, how about first introduce yourself. And then we'll get into some of the fundamentals behind the digestive reset and how it works. So how about just introduce yourself a bit in terms of your story?

Mona: Sure. Hi everyone, my name is Mona and I'm somebody who has practiced yoga for a couple of decades. I've been a yoga teacher trainer for almost two decades. And probably about a dozen, 15 years ago I got really sick.

Isn't that why we all seek out the health stuff is when our health disappears, then we are inspired to find it again. And I had a very circuitous path around health where I did mainstream medical, it didn't quite work out for me. I did a variety of alternative pieces.

And then I was oh so pleasantly surprised when Ayurveda showed up yet again. Because I think in most 200-hour programs there's a little dabble of Ayurveda there, you know, two or three hours you do a few dosha quizzes, you get all excited, you wonder what your dosha is and then you go back to yoga.

## Ep #46: Digestive Reset

And so I had the pleasure of doing an entire weeklong immersion into different Ayurvedic practices. And even in that week alone I all of a sudden noticed that the plateau I had hit, I was all of a sudden over the top of that and running up the hill again.

So it inspired me to further my Ayurvedic studies. And so since then I did foundations program, I've done my Ayurvedic health counselor program. I'm a NAMA certified Ayurvedic practitioner. I'm an Ayurvedic yoga therapist. I kind of went whole hog into the Ayurveda land place.

I've written two books on the Ayurveda and so Ayurveda has really become a huge part of my healing and therefore a huge part of my teaching.

Susi: Love it. So we're looking and talking about digestive reset. Let's talk about what it is and some of the fundamentals behind it.

Mona: So Ayurveda is this full-blown medical science that is considered holistic in a couple of different ways. The first way is that the intention or the goal of Ayurveda is to maintain the health of the healthy person.

Now if somebody gets sick Ayurveda will do its best to help them reclaim their health. However, the goal is the maintenance of health. And part of how we do this from an Ayurvedic perspective is through the alignment with natural rhythms. Alignment with natural rhythms, which means that there are certain times a year where we eat certain foods, and certain times a year where we do certain practices.

And in the spring, after coming out of a winter filled with mac and cheese, and chili, and Shepherd's pies, we typically end up, for a variety of reasons including a lack of sunlight, a lot of mac and cheese and shepherd's pie, feeling a little bit slobby and maybe even a little bit sludgy. We end up with some build up that we needed in the winter but we don't need it once we transition into spring, especially as we move into summer.

## Ep #46: Digestive Reset

And so one of our common practices in Ayurveda in the springtime is to do something called a digestive reset. And what this involves is a rekindling of the digestive fire. So actually taking time to really focus on boosting your ability to digest not only your food, but your thoughts, your emotions in the whole of your life to allow the Ama, any of the sludgy, sticky stuff that might have built up.

I don't know about anybody else, I always have build up. I think even the Dalai Lama might have build up. And so we all get build up and we all need tools to move that out. And in kindling the fire and simplifying our lives in a certain amount of ways does that.

This also helps us to boost our immunity. And then we, in the springtime reset, focus on practices to get things moving and circulating so that the ama moves out as well. So we work to reduce stagnation or to produce circulation and movement.

So a spring digestive reset is part of aligning with natural rhythms. But it's also a huge part of increasing the efficiency of our overall biological system.

Susi: And that is where we're looking at Agni.

Mona: Yes, yes. In Ayurveda Agni is one of the central concepts. This idea that it's our inner sun. So, much like the sun is the center of our universe, our Agni, our inner digestive fire is the center of our biological universe. And so without this ability to digest well, we're not able to create healthy tissues.

And not only can we not create healthy tissues, we might have the wrong amounts or in the wrong places, neither of those things are beneficial. We struggle with eliminating the waste product. So then we end up with a buildup of sludge or a buildup of toxicity in our system. Our mind goes foggy, the tongue gets coated, the elimination of wastes becomes

## Ep #46: Digestive Reset

compromised. And then over all we start to lose our resilience and our health.

So Agni is considered one of the central pieces were in Ayurveda almost everything we do has an angle around how to support the digestive potential, the digestive fire, the Agni.

Susi: When people shift up their diets in a way that might look similar to what is done within the Ayurvedic digestive reset, sometimes people can call it a cleanse. Now I've done cleanses in the past and I know what that experience is. And I also know that the experience of a digestive reset is very different from that and I would love to hear your take on the distinction between a cleanse and a digestive reset.

Mona: Yeah, I think this is a place where there can be a lot of confusion, and for a lot of very, very good reasons. I think people have different ideas about what is needed. And honestly different people need different things, so that's absolutely super fair.

So we have cleansing in Ayurveda as well. And when we talk about cleansing in Ayurveda, we're talking about Panchakarma. My husband always says anytime I mention Panchakarma, he says, "Why would you punch karma? It sounds like a terrible idea."

And it's this idea Panchakarma is a forceful expulsion of toxins and excess from the body. Excess doshas, excess waste. It is very, very intense. Not everybody has enough resilience, enough ojas to be able to handle Panchakarma or to be able to handle a cleanse of that nature.

And there are three stages to cleansing. First you have to prepare the body for the cleanse. Then you have to actually expulse the excess. Then you have to rebuild the body, and this can take anywhere from weeks to months. And not a lot of people are going to take six months to be under the supervision of somebody to help them navigate that.

## Ep #46: Digestive Reset

So we do have cleansing in Ayurveda, it's much more intensive. It almost requires, to a certain degree, being in a clinic where you can be supervised because your treatment is determined day after day based on where you're at and what's happening in your body. So it's not something people navigate on their own.

Whereas a digestive reset isn't about forceful expulsion of anything. It's about bringing all the natural functions of our own biology back online so that we can optimize the function. And for sure, there's some excesses that will move out. We might move out some excess waste, we might move out some excess buildup of emotions. We might have all sorts of old weird thoughts come up and be like, "Whoa, where did that come from? I thought I had dealt with that."

So things that are partially digested have a chance to come back into our experience for full digestion and then integration into our system. But a digestive reset isn't about the forceful expulsion of anything. It's about balancing the system for optimal function.

So I think from an Ayurvedic perspective that's our distinction. Those are two different ideas and we're trying to do two different things, which means we do them in two different ways.

Susi: My own experience with digestive resets has been really, really interesting. And I just sort of did them because it was what I felt that I needed to do, but also because it was a part of the program that I was running and I was doing it alongside the trainees that we were doing it. And then I had this real aha one spring, where I was recognizing that out of the spring reset, I was actually preparing myself seasonally.

So the spring was shifting up what I was doing through the winter, and then it was preparing me for summer in a sense. And when I was in summer, I started to clue in in a more connected way to how what I was eating and imbibing was impacting me.

## Ep #46: Digestive Reset

Now the reason that this was important is because it was one of these revelatory ahas because typically, and this has been for as long as I can remember, definitely through my high school years, that my fall was always a slower, harder season for me. My grades were lower, I was generally more lethargic.

And then as I moved into my 20s and my 30s I just sort of learned that this was just the way things were. I made it a ritual, like I bought a cozy sweater and a new hat and a set of gloves and I just made the fall about getting cozy and sort of, you know, I guess buffering my way through it, if I look back on it now. And then we filled the freezer, and we just kind of got prepared to hunker down in default.

But then something started to happen out of realizing and recognizing what I was doing in the summer and how I was consuming in the summer actually impacted the way I transitioned into the fall. And it was one of those things that really blew my brains a bit of like, "What?" And then when I had that fall, I didn't actually feel a lot of the needs to do many of the things that I had done to buffer the fall.

Fall became just an easier season. So then I got excited about the next cycle through the year of then when I did this spring digestive reset and how that felt going into summer. And then fall has just become fun, like way more fun. And how my being is very different.

So it might seem really strange to people hearing that, some people get super inspired about it because they also recognize that different seasons have impact on them. And they might never have thought of how the prior season can impact the one that they have the difficulty with. And that by doing a reset it almost gives a clarity to, this going to sound so weird to say it but it also seems so true, is it's a clarity of where I sat in the year. And how even just the spring and what I did in the spring would impact me the following fall.



## Ep #46: Digestive Reset

Can you bring a little more, like even when I say it out loud, to me it's just so like, "Well yeah, like, that makes sense." But even to say it out loud I can imagine people furrowing their brow, kind of like what? So can you bring a bit more about why that would be? How can something that I do in the spring impact me in the fall in that way?

Mona: Yeah, absolutely. And I remember you texting me that first fall where you were like, "I kind of don't feel like I need my sweater." And I was like, "What? That's amazing." And that's some of the brilliance of this getting to know the seasonal rhythms and aligning with them.

And so if over the winter, which we know is the hibernation season. We may not as humans hibernate the way animals do, because of electricity and modern day and, you know, the way we have culturally chosen to unfold life. However, there's a part of us that really does in the winter hunker in, settle down, and try to slow down. That's part of the natural rhythm.

And in doing that we sort of get a bit of build up because we're not as active, we're not as mobile, we're not doing as many things so the build up starts. And if in the spring we clear it out, that's one thing. But if in the spring we don't, then that build up keeps building up in the summer. And it keeps building up until the fall.

And then all of a sudden, we have even more build up, we'll feel foggier, heavier, denser, thicker, slower. All the qualities of the buildup, because we're just increasing those qualities. And so we kind of hunker in for another slow, dense, heavy, thick hibernation season. And we just rinse, wash, repeat over and over until we don't.

I love the digestive resets because I think of them as this pause in the whole thing where I can stop the habits that I had in place. I can explore a bit of a different way of being, a very simple form of eating. I might keep some of my daily routine, but I might let some of the things go. I might add new things, I might not. It depends on what feels right.

[From Pain to Possibility](#) with Susi Hatelty

## Ep #46: Digestive Reset

And yet, that time spent in the reset gives me an opportunity to be really present with how am I feeling? What am I doing? And how is my system responding to those stimuli? So it's all laws of karma, right? We apply a stimulus, each stimulus gives us a response. This is the laws of karma that we talk about all the time in yoga. And this is what we do in therapeutic yoga, we apply a stimulus, we see the response.

And so when we take the time to clear the channels, which is really a big part of what we're doing in the digestive reset by enkindling this Agni. Again, Agni is inherently intelligent, it knows what to do with all the things that are in our biology and how to use them most effectively as long as it has the space. As long as it has the power. As long as we give it the support it needs, it will guide us really, really well. And so as we enkindle the Agni, it clears the gunk, the ama out of the channels. And this clears the way for whatever comes next.

That's why after a digestive reset people will say I feel lighter. I feel more clear. I feel like I know where I'm going now. And that, of course changes whatever comes next because we're moving into it from a different place. Because we've changed a little bit over the course of the reset, hopefully in the ways of increasing our self-awareness. Because it really is, all the Vedic sciences are about self-awareness.

Susi: Now, one thing that I've always found very interesting about digestive resets, and I should preface this by saying there was a period of time when I was working with my husband, Stu, and his psoriasis. And we've done previous episodes about his psoriasis and things that he really learned about foods that flare him and foods that really nourish him.

And we did a lot of different diet explorations. We did The Whole 30, we did AIP Paleo, like we've done a whole bunch of them that are out there. And the distinction between those is that even though in the digestive reset there's a principle of subtraction, a medicine of subtraction. In each of those, there's also a medicine of subtraction. But there's just this feeling,

## Ep #46: Digestive Reset

and I'm not sure if I'm making sense when I say this, but there was just this feeling of more of a rigidity in the process than in the digestive reset.

And while those processes were very effective in helping Stu uncover some of what he was sensitive to, and it was effective from that perspective, the digestive reset has a different nourishing quality. Even though inside of the reset, there's still this medicine of subtraction, you're still taking away a number of the foods that are in those other protocols. So I'm just curious, can you speak to that a bit?

Mona: Absolutely. So, from my understanding of Ayurveda, we have this Agni, this digestive fire, and it's like the center of our individual universe. And we have this other piece, which would be like the moon of our universe, right?

So if we think of astrology, the two main luminaries in Vedic astrology and Western astrology are the sun and the moon. And so the counterpart of the Sun is the moon and, in this case, we would say is like our ojas. And ojas is this biological substance that is connected to, that is related to our immunity, our stability, our resilience, our endurance, and our strength.

And so this ojas is very, very, very important. And biological ojas is a result of digestion. And so if there's not enough food or if there's not enough nourishment there won't be any ojas. We won't actually build our resilience. And so we need this balance of sun and moon, you need night and day. You need strong digestive fire and you need strong immunity, resilience, endurance, strength, and capacity.

And so the way that I feel a digestive reset can be useful is to work with both of those elements. Is to make sure that whatever protocol is happening there's not so much subtraction that we lose our ability to rebuild and strengthen and fortify our ojas. So we don't want to sacrifice the moon for the sun, but we don't want to sacrifice the sun for the moon either. We need to find that place of balance between the fire and the water, right? The fire and the water.

[From Pain to Possibility](#) with Susi Hatley

## Ep #46: Digestive Reset

And so the digestive resets that I take people through, I make sure nobody's hungry, people may miss their coffee, they may miss their chocolate, and they may miss snacking. However, they're eating whole foods. They are eating as much as they need to in order to have the strength to go through their day.

And that strength to go through their day, the energy to get through the day comes from the sun. But the strength to get through the day with stability, and ease, and grace that comes from the moon, that's the ojas. And so it's this balancing of our inner sun and moon, right? It's making sure that although we want to clear the channels, we don't want to strip everything down till there's nothingness.

And that's where I think some of the cleanses go really far. And I also want to say there's a place and a time for that. So depending on if somebody has a certain sickness, or a certain disorder or a certain disease, you might have to pull it right down to the scaffolding. I get it, I've been there.

And for those of us who are pretty healthy, generally speaking, we don't need to take ourselves right down to the studs every spring. We just need to create a context where the system can clear itself, we can strengthen our fire, we can strengthen our water, so that we can move through the rest of the year with ease, with grace, with joy, with energy so we can live the lives we're here to live.

Susi: That's a really, really great way of explaining it because Stu got incredible benefit from doing the AIP Paleo. And I did it with him, and when I came off of it it was illuminating as I re-brought in foods, what I could feel impacting me. And The Whole 30 was a fascinating experience. It's not quite as restrictive as the AIP Paleo, but again there's a place for it. And you explained it really, really, really nicely.

Which takes me to the next question I have for you because this reset, and not surprising given the current environment we're in in the past year and all of that, is that this one has a lot more of a mental, emotional, spiritual

[From Pain to Possibility](#) with Susi Hatley

## Ep #46: Digestive Reset

component to it. And perhaps it's also because I've done so many of them that it's like, "Here we go again." Like we know what we're doing, we know what we're up to.

And there's this other element around mental, emotional spiritual that just so weaves in with how I'm eating, the space between meals. There's just more that's bubbling up. Not so much in a negative way, but more in a revelatory, if I can use that word. It's not surprising given the year but it's still, I'm going to be kind of vague in this, because it's still very fascinating to just see the ama on all levels. The congestion, the stagnation on all levels that is now seemingly ready to clear.

Mona: Yeah, I feel like that's been the theme in this year's digestive resetting. I did mine at the beginning of April and I found the same thing on a biological level. I mean, I've been doing digestive resets every spring for about 10 years now, you know, and I do one in the fall. And I do many resets throughout the year as well. Where I'll take at least one weekend a month and do a little reset. Usually it coincides with the teaching weekend, just keeps my life nice and simple and lets me be clear and energized.

So I feel like over the past decade a lot of things have changed. And this year I also definitely felt it on a more mental, emotional, spiritual type of level. Especially given that at this time I'm in the process of closing my business, right? So my bricks and mortar business is one of the things that I will be letting go of this year. Lots of things I'm letting go of this year, that's one of the big ones.

And so if we think about our humaneness from the perspective of the koshas, the sheaths. We have the biological sheath, the annamaya-kosha, it's all of our physicality. It's our doshas, it's our Agni, it's our water, it's our fire. It's our Earth, it's our air, it's our space. It's all of us in our five-element form.

Then from there we have our energy body, the pranamaya-kosha. And this is when we do our breath work. And this is when we do our mudras, and

[From Pain to Possibility](#) with Susi Hatley

## Ep #46: Digestive Reset

our mantras, and all these types of things as we move into the more subtle. And then from there we have our emotional body, we have our mental body, we have our spiritual self.

And so I have always felt that these digestive resets were touching on all those layers. And that I think each one we do, maybe one layer talks a little louder because it finally has the door open for it to communicate with us, for it to share with us whatever it is it wants us to hear. Maybe it's like, "Actually, we do this thing a little bit too much." Or "Hey, this resting is really good." Or "Tongue scraping, that's a keeper."

You know, there's all these different opportunities. And I feel like, much like in our asana practice and our yoga pose practice it, for a lot of people, starts out very physical. And then it becomes very subtle energetic. And then it becomes a little more emotional. And then it becomes, you know, like we deepen in with each iteration.

I remember somebody saying to me one time, "If yoga was a shape, it would be like a spiral where you go in a circle. But every time you circle you get a little closer to the middle, a little closer to the middle." And then picture it as a funnel like a tornado. And so each time you repeat cat and cow it's not the same as the time before because you're a little bit different.

But you get the opportunity for a new insight, whether it's about how your body feels, or about how your breath moves, or about the emotions that arise when you do a back bend versus a forward bend. Or maybe where your mind goes or doesn't go. Or what allows you to connect to your essence, right?

So the digestive reset is another tool that allows us this opportunity to just sort of keep spiraling and sinking deeper and deeper into ourselves. And what's really cool is I've always understood ama, this build up, the clogs in the pipes I like to call ama, the clogs in the pipes. All of our pipes can get clogged, our spiritual pipes, our mental pipes, our emotional pipes, our chronic pipes.

[From Pain to Possibility](#) with Susi Hately

## Ep #46: Digestive Reset

Everybody's always talking about the blockages in their chakras, right? And so it's like those are, that's just clogs in your energy pipes. Just like you can get clogs in your physical pipes, which is why you get pain here, or you needed a stent there, you know? All these types of ways we can get clogs.

And the digestive reset, because we're working on Agni and because we're building our own ojas, the working on Agni lets us start to dig out some of this stuff that's ready to be seen. But that strengthening of ojas gives us the ability to actually be with it.

And so if it was all Agni, we would tear through it, but it might rip us apart. We might be like, "Oh, woe it's me, I cannot deal with the things that are arising." Whereas I think when we do this over a period of time, we're like, "Oh, that's back." And instead of being like, "Oh crap, I hated it last time it was here. I fought it; I dug my heels in." And it's like, "Interesting, it's back." And we have more of this resilience, this stability, this endurance to be with the weird and the hard that does come up as part of our humaneness.

And so I think the digestive reset, it's definitely this amazing biological fine tuning. And it's this opportunity to integrate your biology with your energy, with your emotions, with your mind, with your spirit. Because all of yoga, all of Ayurveda, all the Vedic sciences are about the integration of all of our pieces so that we can feel our wholeness. We can recognize we are whole and complete as we are in this very moment.

Susi: I love it. And that really sums up digestive reset right there.

If you're listening to this and you're thinking, "Oh yeah, that's something that I want." Or you're thinking, "Oh boy, maybe this is something I don't want, but want." Then I'm going to let you know where you can find Mona's site and you can read up on her program. And it's Janatiyoga.com, and Janati is spelled J-A-N as in Nancy, A-T-I. Janatiyoga, all one word, .com/program. And you can read all about the digestive reset.

## Ep #46: Digestive Reset

And you recommend, Mona, that they start it by when? Because yours is a three-week process, right?

Mona: It's a four-week process. We do one week prep, one week of coming back to what I call the regular at the end, and then the two weeks in between if people want to do it that long.

It's a one-month process and so usually for the spring people are going to want to get launched or get started by mid-May, right? They're going to want to get started by mid-May so that they can be done by mid-June.

And then the way the program is set up is it gives you all the tools that you need to do it on your own moving forward. So you only really have to sign up for the program one time. And then once you've done it once, every time it's different. And it is a little bit easier each other time.

And so some years I do my digestive reset in April, other years I do it in May. And then moving forward you'll be able to sort of assess what works with your life. Does it work for you to do it in April? Does it work better for you to do it in May? And then you can decide and choose for yourself knowing what you know about you, when the best time will be.

Susi: One thing I want to add before we finish up is those of you who might be thinking this would be really great but I've got kids, I've got a family, I've got this and that. And I want to mention that I've got a set of four-year-old twins and there were times when they were younger that they totally loved mommies yellow rice is what they called it. And these days not so much. And how much extra work is it as a parent to do this?

And what I can say is this, the making of the primary meal, the kitchari, once you've learned it, it's super easy. And Mona provides a variety of different very simple ways of going about this. And so it's a pretty straightforward process that doesn't require a lot of extra, and the simplicity is really great.



## Ep #46: Digestive Reset

So keep that in mind that if you're thinking about it but you're also considering your family, it is an extra pot, and it's one. And once you know what the recipe is, and once you understand the other principles, it feeds in really nicely.

And if as you're listening to this, you want a little bit more of, “Oh boy, how am I going to do this? I really want to do this.” Just send me a note, I'm happy to share. And then Mona, of course, has all of her client stories too that you can connect with her for some simple ideas of how to support yourself as well as nourishing your kids at the same time.

So with that, Mona, thank you. Thank you, thank you, thank you. This was really great. I encourage you all to check out that digestive reset if it resonates with you. And I'm sure we'll have Mona back again. Thanks again, Mona.

Mona: Thanks for having me, Susi.