

The Large Intestine

By the time material reaches the end of the small intestine, most nutrients have been absorbed. The remaining material moves from the small intestine into the large intestine. The **large intestine** is the last section of the digestive system. It is about 1.5 meters long—about as long as the average bathtub. It runs up the right-hand side of the abdomen, across the upper abdomen, and then down the left-hand side. The large intestine contains bacteria that feed on the material passing through. These bacteria normally do not cause disease. In fact, they are helpful because they make certain vitamins, including vitamin K.

The material entering the large intestine contains water and undigested food. As the material moves through the large intestine, water is absorbed into the bloodstream. The remaining material is readied for elimination from the body.

The large intestine ends in a short tube called the **rectum**. Here, waste material is compressed into a solid form. This waste material is eliminated from the body through the **anus**, a muscular opening at the end of the rectum.



FIGURE 20

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As material passes through the large intestine, most of the water is absorbed by the body. The remaining material will be eliminated from the body.



Reading
Checkpoint

What role do bacteria play in the large intestine?