

Gut health and your Microbiome



What is the gut microbiome?

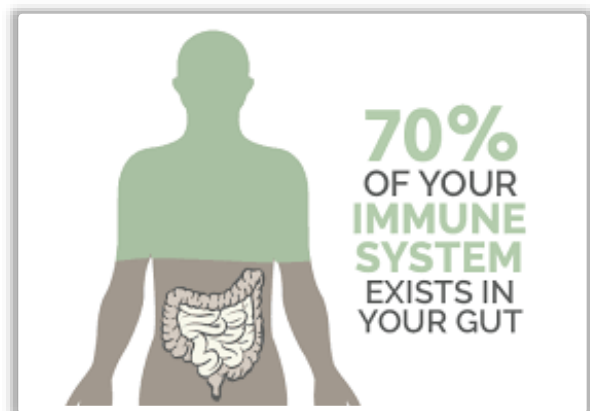
Your microbiome holds trillions of microorganisms in the gut which help regulate important functions for your overall health. Astonishingly the human body has more bacteria than cells. In fact, according to Integrative Medicine: a clinician journal, the bacteria cells harbored within the human gastrointestinal tract (GIT) outnumber humans' cells by a factor of 10! These bacteria found in our gut is responsible for digestion, immune function and our overall health.

Recently there has been extensive research on gut health which found that an imbalance of a normal and healthy gut microbiota can be the leading cause of disease, irritable bowel syndrome, obesity and type 2 diabetes. Although we may not put much thought into our gut health when juggling so many things during these challenging times, we may want to consider how much it truly affects our day to day life.



What are some signs of an unhealthy gut?

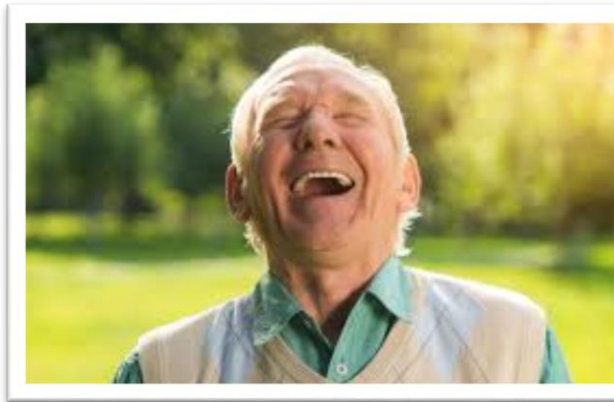
Fatigue, anxiety, joint pain, digestive problems, weight gain, food sensitivities, thyroid conditions, headaches and skin issues like rosacea and acne are all signs of an imbalance gut microbiota.





Ways I can improve my gut health:

- **Eat probiotics and fermented food:** many people supplement their probiotics which can be effective, although it is preferable to get it from a natural source. For example: low sugar yogurt, fermented vegetables, kefir, kimchi, kombucha, miso, sauerkraut and tempeh.
- **Consume prebiotics:** prebiotics are types of fiber that feed on the good bacteria in your gut which helps lead to a healthy digestive system. Some examples of prebiotics are asparagus, banana, leeks garlic, jerusalem artichoke, onions and dandelion greens.
- **Limit sugars and artificial sweeteners:** according to Medical News Today, the authors of a 2015 study in animals suggested that the standard Western diet, which is high in sugar and fat, negatively affects the gut microbiome. In turn, this can influence the brain and behavior. Another animal study reported that the artificial sweetener aspartame increases the number of some bacterial strains that are linked with metabolic disease.





Limit stressors:

Many stressors can negatively affect gut health. For example, lack of sleep, psychological stress and being thrown out of your circadian sleep rhythm. Stress management is crucial to our overall health and wellbeing, so developing a routine can help combat unwanted stress. Meditation, exercising regularly, getting on a consistent sleep schedule and eating a healthy diet are all ways we can reduce stress levels.

Incorporating more fruits and vegetables into your diet:

Adding fruits and vegetables into our daily meals can go a long way when protecting our gut health. By incorporating more of these we can not only get more vitamins and minerals into our diet but also consume more fiber, which is essential for digestion. Fiber is majorly under consumed in most American diets. Some examples of healthy fiber are leafy greens, oats, beans and legumes and of course fruits and vegetables.



The brain-gut connection:

We now understand the importance of gut health for our physical wellbeing, but we must also look at how gut health can affect our brain, which is arguably the most important organ in our body. Recent scientific studies have shown us that there is a direct relationship between our gut health and our brain and that the health of one directly affects the other. By keeping our gut health a priority and incorporating some of the examples shown above we will not only be able to improve ourselves physically but will also be able to combat things like anxiety, anger and depression in the uncertain times we are all experiencing.

Foods to include in managing your gut health:

All fresh seasonal vegetables, especially brassica vegetables and fresh sprouts

All fresh seasonal fruit

All fresh herbs and spices, especially ginger and turmeric

Unsweetened almond milk, rice milk or coconut milk

Fermented foods (kombucha, kimchi, kefir)

Apple cider vinegar

Gluten free grains (rice, quinoa, buckwheat, millet, amaranth.)

Chicken, eggs, fish, turkey (all organic where possible)

Avocado, extra virgin olive oil, raw nuts and seeds (including psyllium husk), nut butters exclude sugary processed peanut butter), coconut oil

Herbal tea (chamomile, mint, ginger, lemon) and green tea

Foods to avoid and limit in managing gut health:

Dairy (natural unflavoured yogurt is ok)

Gluten (wheat bread, cous cous, pasta, rye, spelt)

Legumes (lentils, adzuki, black eyed peas are okay)

Deli meats, red meat, bacon, sausages

Processed/ refined foods (breakfast cereal, canned foods, chips, biscuits, pastries, muffins...)

Sugar, sweets, milk chocolate, jams, fruit spreads

Fast food (burgers, fried foods)

Alcohol, coffee, soft drinks

Margarine, commercial dressings, sauces, artificial colours, flavours, additives, flavour enhancers & hydrogenated fats, artificial sugar