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NUTRITION & NATUROPATHY

Healthy
HAPPY GUT

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Foods for a Happy Gut

Beneficial, diverse and health promoting gut microbes require a fibre-rich diet to thrive. There's nothing your gut bugs love more than consuming a wide variety of prebiotic foods and microbiome accessible carbohydrates (MACs), which provides them with the energy required to grow and flourish.

Prebiotics present in fruits, vegetables and wholegrains are a type of fibre that your digestive system cannot breakdown. Types of prebiotics include fructo-oligosaccharides (FOS), inulin and galacto-oligosaccharides (GOS). Additional foods that can be utilised by your gut microbiome include MACs, also known as resistant starches, such as rolled oats, lentils and beans.

Through a process known as fermentation, your gut microbes breakdown these food components and convert them into nutrients that can be used for nourishment and growth. For instance, compounds known as short chain fatty acids (SCFAs) are produced from microbial fermentation of prebiotic and MAC foods, which supply your microbiome with a healthy environment to flourish, as well as providing additional digestive, immune and metabolic health benefits.

Eating a diet rich in prebiotic and MAC foods plays a large role in shaping your microbial communities including increasing beneficial gut flora populations and microbial diversity, which are markers of a healthy gut microbiome.



What about the Mediterranean Diet

What you consume is what fuels your body. Therefore, eating a wide variety of whole foods, consistent with a Mediterranean-style diet, will provide your body with essential nutrients for optimal function. As mentioned, supplying ample prebiotic and MAC food sources will also encourage healthy gut microbiome composition.

Current evidence suggests that the Mediterranean diet provides protection against several diseases associated with digestive dysfunction inflammation, poor immunity and psychological distress – giving you the best chance at supporting optimal health and wellbeing.

The Mediterranean diet includes a high intake of fruits and vegetables, lean protein, quality essential fatty acids, and wholegrains (limiting starchy grains and vegetables).

Below is an example of how to build a healthy meal based on these recommendations.



Your Gut Health Tool Kit

Glutamine

Glutamine is an amino acid that provides energy to the cells of your intestine, enabling them to remain healthy and maintain their functional integrity. Glutamine has also been found to increase gut immunity, therefore improving immune function and defence against harmful microbes, while also providing anti-inflammatory support. Food sources containing glutamine include meat, poultry, eggs, dairy and fish.

Vitamin D

Vitamin D optimises gut-associated immunity and regulates inflammation. Additionally, studies have shown vitamin D supplementation improves gut microbial diversity and microbiome health, with low vitamin D levels linked to dysbiosis. Dietary sources of vitamin D include calamari, cheese, chlorella, egg yolk, herring and sprouted seeds. Also known as the 'sunshine vitamin', vitamin D forms in the skin when it is exposed to UV from sunlight. Don't forget to use sun protection when the UV Index is 3 or above, or when spending extended periods of time outdoors.

Zinc

Zinc is a healing nutrient, helping to repair and protect gut epithelial cells (the internal lining of your GI tract) that are damaged or inflamed. Adequate zinc is also critical for the production of hydrochloric acid in gastric juices; essential for food breakdown in the stomach. Foods such as red meat, poultry, eggs, mushrooms, spinach, and a variety of nuts and seeds provide rich sources of zinc.

Meadowsweet

Historically, meadowsweet has been used for its protective effects against inflammatory digestive conditions, with more recent evidence also supporting its ability to relieve inflammation-induced gut pain. As such, meadowsweet soothes an irritated gut and alleviates digestive discomfort.

Ginger

Ginger has been shown to decrease gut pain and spasm and promote optimal movement of food through your GI tract, therefore helping to reduce common digestive symptoms including nausea, flatulence and bloating.

Your Gut Health Tool Kit

Licorice

Liquorice is a powerful anti-inflammatory herb that promotes mucus production throughout the upper GI lining, therefore healing damage to the mucus layer and restoring the protective barrier it provides to underlying gut epithelial cells. Liquorice has been shown to assist with upper GI symptoms including indigestion and reflux.

Digestive enzymes

When consumed with a meal, supplemental enzymes enhance the digestion of carbohydrates, protein and fat from your food. Supplemental enzymes are particularly beneficial when enzyme production is reduced (such as in the presence of a digestive disorder), which can compromise your gut's ability to effectively breakdown food, leading to digestive symptoms such as bloating and burping.

Bitter herbs

Bitter herbal remedies have been used traditionally to promote digestion. For instance, the bitter constituents found in dandelion root may increase gastric acid secretion, promote bile acid production in the liver and stimulate release of stored bile from the gallbladder. Additionally, gentian contains several bitter compounds that have been shown to increase production of digestive secretions.

Probiotics

Probiotics are live, microorganisms that interact with your gut microbes and digestive tissue, such as the gut barrier, restoring levels of beneficial gut microbes and improving your digestive function as they travel through your gut. Strains including LGG®, BB-12® and *Saccharomyces cerevisiae* (boulardii) enhance the growth and function of your beneficial gut flora. Additionally, these strains suppress the growth of potentially harmful gut microbes and support healthy gut mucosal linings, essential to optimal bowel function. This strain combination is particularly beneficial following antibiotic use

Partially hydrolysed guar gum (PHGG)

PHGG is a unique prebiotic fibre that regulates the transit of food through your digestive tract, therefore preventing or reducing constipation while also supporting the growth and function of your beneficial gut microbes to enhance microbiome health. As well as reducing constipation, PHGG may alleviate bloating, gut pain and flatulence.

Hot Tips for a Smooth Digestion

Consume plenty of fibre-rich wholefoods to regulate your bowel habits and provide your gut bacteria with their preferred food. Nourishing your gut bugs with a whole food diet can increase the concentration of beneficial gut microbes, which may strengthen your gut-brain connection and improve your digestion, balance your hormones and enhance your mood.

limit your consumption of processed foods that are high in sugar and saturated fat (think hamburgers, fried foods, lollies, soft drink, white bread, sweet biscuits etc), as well as moderating your alcohol consumption. These foods and drinks can be damaging to your gut microbiome when consumed regularly or in large amounts.

Make a meal plan for the week and buy all your ingredients in one dedicated shopping day. Planning is key to ensuring you stick to a healthy diet.

Eat mindfully. Mindful eating promotes digestive functions and modulates your body's stress response. This practice supports the 'rest and digest' philosophy, regulating the passage of food through your digestive tract, enhancing digestive enzyme and acid production, and ultimately improving nutrient absorption and assimilation

Stay hydrated. Maintaining consistent fluid intake including water and herbal teas can prevent constipation. Aim to drink 1.5 L to 2 L of fluid each day.



Hot Tips for a Smooth Digestion

Eat on schedule. Remember that your body is set to a 24-hour cycle (the circadian rhythm), which governs daily rhythms across all body systems including your gut health. Implementing regular dietary habits will promote a robust gut function and regulate digestion, absorption, and motility (i.e., your bowel habits).

Chill out. Having explored the connection between the gut and the brain, it's clear that uncontrolled stress can have a detrimental impact on your digestive tract and vice versa. Stress management techniques can be as simple as taking a moment out of each day to focus on your breathing, engaging in meditation, or practicing gentle forms of exercise such as yoga or Pilates. For additional ways to support your body through times of stress, speak to your healthcare Practitioner.

Move your body. Regular physical activity has multiple health benefits including easing constipation, enhancing gut microbiome health, alleviating stress, and improving your mood; all of which support gut health. Find activities that you enjoy and practice these on a regular basis. Joining an interest club (i.e., a running club) or participating in group fitness classes can also be a fun way of remaining motivated and engaged in physical activity.

Give your body ample time to rest. Remember, sleep quality is intricately linked to gut health. Therefore, improving your sleep quality and maintaining healthy sleep hygiene can improve your digestive function.

