



The incredible complexity of the gut and its importance to our overall health is a topic of increasing research in the medical community. Numerous studies in the past two decades have demonstrated links between gut health and the immune system, mood, mental health, autoimmune diseases, endocrine disorders, skin conditions, and cancer.

The term "gut microbiome" refers specifically to the microorganisms living in your intestines. A person has about 300 to 500 different species of bacteria in their digestive tract. While some microorganisms are harmful to our health, many are incredibly beneficial and even necessary to a healthy body.

Having a wide variety of these good bacteria in your gut can enhance your immune system function, improve symptoms of depression, help combat obesity, and provide numerous other benefits.

## SIGNS OF AN UNHEALTHY GUT

Many facets of modern life such as high stress levels, too little sleep, eating processed and high-sugar foods, can all damage our gut microbiome. This in turn may affect other aspects of our health, such as the brain, heart, immune system, skin, weight, hormone levels, ability to absorb nutrients, and even the development of cancer.

Here are a few of the most common signs of an unhealthy gut:

### \* UPSET STOMACH

Stomach disturbances like gas, bloating, constipation, diarrhoea, and heartburn can all be signs of an unhealthy gut. A balanced gut will have less difficulty processing food and eliminating waste.

### \* A HIGH SUGAR DIET

A diet high in processed foods and added sugars can

decrease the number of good bacteria in your gut. This imbalance can cause increased sugar cravings, which can damage your gut still further. High amounts of refined sugars, particularly high-fructose corn syrup, have been linked to increased inflammation in the body.

### \* UNINTENTIONAL WEIGHT CHANGES

Gaining or losing weight without making changes to your diet or exercise habits may be a sign of an unhealthy gut. An imbalanced gut can impair your body's ability to absorb nutrients, regulate blood sugar, and store fat. Weight loss may be caused by small intestinal bacterial overgrowth. While weight gain may be caused by insulin resistance or the urge to overeat due to decreased nutrient absorption.

### \* SLEEP DISTURBANCES OR CONSTANT FATIGUE

An unhealthy gut may contribute to sleep disturbances such as insomnia or poor sleep, and therefore lead to chronic fatigue. The majority of the body's serotonin, a hormone that affects mood and sleep, is produced in the gut. So gut damage can impair your ability to sleep well. Some sleep disturbances have also been linked to risk for fibromyalgia.

### \* SKIN IRRITATION

Skin conditions like eczema may be related to a damaged gut. Inflammation in the gut caused by a poor diet or food allergies may cause increased "leaking" of certain proteins out into the body, which can in turn irritate the skin and cause conditions such as eczema.

### \* AUTOIMMUNE CONDITIONS

Medical researchers are continually finding new evidence of the impact of the gut on the immune system. It's thought that an unhealthy gut may increase systemic inflammation and alter the proper functioning of the immune system. This can lead to autoimmune diseases, where the body attacks itself rather than harmful invaders.

### \* FOOD INTOLERANCES

Food intolerances are the result of difficulty digesting certain foods (this is different than a food allergy, which is caused by an immune system reaction to certain foods). It's thought that food intolerances may be caused by poor quality of bacteria in the gut.

## THINGS YOU CAN DO TO HELP YOUR GUT HEALTH

Here are a few things that you can do to help improve your gut health:

### ✓ LOWER YOUR STRESS LEVELS

Chronic high levels of stress are hard on your whole body, including your gut. Some ways to lower stress may include meditation, walking, getting a massage, spending time with friends or family, diffusing essential oils, decreasing caffeine intake, laughing, yoga, or having a pet.

### ✓ GET ENOUGH SLEEP

Not getting enough or sufficient quality of sleep can have serious impacts on your gut health, which can in turn contribute to more sleep issues. Try to prioritize getting at least 7–8 hours of uninterrupted sleep per night.

### ✓ EAT SLOWLY

Chewing your food thoroughly and eating your meals more slowly can help promote full digestion and absorption of nutrients. This may help you reduce digestive discomfort and maintain a healthy gut.

### ✓ STAY HYDRATED

Drinking plenty of water has been shown to have a beneficial effect on the mucosal lining of the intestines, as well as on the balance of good bacteria in the gut. Staying hydrated is a simple way to promote a healthy gut.

### ✓ TAKE A PREBIOTIC OR PROBIOTIC

Adding a prebiotic or probiotic supplement to your diet may be a great way to improve your gut health. Prebiotics provide “food” meant to promote the growth of beneficial bacteria in the gut, while probiotics are live good bacteria. People with bacterial overgrowth, should not take probiotics. Not all probiotic supplements are high quality or will provide benefit. It’s best to consult your healthcare provider when choosing a probiotic or prebiotic supplement to ensure the best health benefit.

### ✓ CHECK FOR FOOD INTOLERANCES

If you have symptoms such as cramping, bloating, abdominal pain, diarrhoea, rashes, nausea, fatigue, and acid reflux, you may be suffering from a food intolerance. You can try eliminating common trigger foods to see if your symptoms improve. If you can

identify a food or foods that are contributing to your symptoms, you may see a positive change in your digestive health by changing your eating habits.

### ✓ CHANGE YOUR DIET

Reducing the amount of processed, high-sugar, and high-fat foods that you eat can contribute to better gut health. Additionally, eating plenty of plant-based foods and lean protein can positively impact your gut. A diet high in fibre has been shown to contribute tremendously to a healthy gut microbiome.

## 4 TYPES OF FOOD FOR GUT HEALTH

Diet and gut health are very closely linked. Avoiding processed foods, high-fat foods, and foods high in refined sugars is extremely important to maintaining a healthy microbiome, as these foods destroy good bacteria and promote growth of damaging bacteria. There are also a few foods you can eat that actively promote the growth of beneficial bacteria, contributing to your overall health. These foods include:

### 1. HIGH-FIBRE FOODS

High-fibre foods such as legumes, beans, peas, oats, bananas, berries, asparagus, and leeks have shown a positive impact on gut health in numerous.

### 2. GARLIC AND ONION

Garlic and onion may have some anti-cancer and immune system-enhancing properties based on various studies, which are closely tied to some of the primary functions of the gut. Some of these benefits are anecdotal, although some research has been done.

### 3. FERMENTED FOODS

Fermented foods such as kimchi, sauerkraut, yogurt, tempeh, miso, and kefir are great dietary sources of probiotics. While the quality of these foods may vary, their benefits on the gut microbiome are well.

### 4. COLLAGEN-BOOSTING FOODS

Collagen-rich foods such as bone broth and salmon may be beneficial to overall health and gut health specifically. You could also try to boost your body’s own collagen production through foods. Try adding a variety of foods, like mushrooms, good dairy, or certain meats.