

Gut health & the microbiome: A guide to better wellbeing



Understanding the foundations of digestive and mental wellbeing



Content reviewed in February 2025
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Gut health refers to the balance and function of the microorganisms living in your digestive system, known as the gut microbiome. A healthy gut is linked to better digestion, reduced bloating, improved mental health and overall wellbeing.

However, with the rise of social media, there's a lot of mixed messaging - quick-fix products like bloating teas and supplements often promise results without addressing the root cause. Instead of relying on social media trends, it's essential to understand what's truly affecting your gut and seek professional advice if needed. The real focus is what you're putting in your body as opposed to what you're taking away.

What can affect gut health?

Gut health is influenced by various factors, including:

- **Diet** – A lack of fibre, excessive processed foods, or imbalanced meals can disrupt gut health.
- **Stress** – High-stress levels trigger digestive issues by activating the body's fight-or-flight response.
- **Sleep** – Poor sleep can impact digestion and energy levels.
- **Exercise** – Lack of regular physical activity.
- Excessive **alcohol** or **antibiotic** use.
- **Eating on the go** - When your gut doesn't know when food is coming, it struggles to digest food when overwhelmed.
- **Distracted eating** - checking emails or social media while eating, depending on the content can cause a reaction to the gut. Say you start to panic about a work email that you can't deal with until the next day your gut responds to this stress.
- **Nocebo Effect** – If you believe certain foods (e.g. gluten) will cause issues and you develop a fear of how this may impact you, stress alone may trigger these symptoms.

The gut-brain connection

Your gut and brain are directly linked via the gut-brain axis. The gut produces serotonin, the “happy hormone,” which plays a key role in mood regulation. When stressed, your brain activates the sympathetic nervous system, which can disrupt digestion. This is why anxiety or nervousness can cause stomach discomfort. Think about when you’re nervous and experiencing ‘butterflies’ in your stomach, it’s all linked.

Signs of an Imbalanced Gut Microbiome

If your gut microbiome is out of balance, you may experience these symptoms:

- Digestive issues: bloating, gas, constipation, diarrhoea
- Fatigue and brain fog
- Skin problems (e.g. breakouts, eczema flare-ups)
- Poor sleep quality
- Sluggish energy, despite a healthy diet and lifestyle

If these symptoms persist, make sure to consult a healthcare professional to rule out any underlying conditions.

How to improve gut health

A healthy gut isn’t just about diet—it’s about a holistic approach to wellbeing. By prioritising gut health, it can have a positive impact on mental wellbeing. Here’s how you can support your gut microbiome:

1 Eat a diverse, whole-food diet

- Increase your intake of plant-based foods—vegetables, fruits, nuts, seeds, legumes.
- Include a variety of foods to encourage diverse gut bacteria.
- Add more colours to your plate—different nutrients support different gut microbes.
- Start small: swap snacks, add mixed nuts or seeds, and gradually introduce more variety.

2 Reduce stress & improve lifestyle habits

- Set boundaries with work and screen time—avoid checking emails or scrolling social media before bed.
- Prioritise activities that reduce stress, such as walking, reading or spending time with friends.
- Schedule “me-time” as a non-negotiable appointment to unwind.

3 Support digestion through mindful eating

- Avoid eating while distracted—give your gut time to process food properly.
- Eat slowly and chew thoroughly—digestion starts in the mouth.
- Manage meal timings—allow breaks between meals to support digestion.

4 Prioritise quality sleep

- Reduce screen time before bed—blue light affects melatonin production.
- Establish a consistent sleep routine.
- Create a relaxing evening environment (e.g. herbal tea, dim lighting, calming activities).

Small Changes, Big Impact

Improving gut health doesn't require drastic changes overnight. Start by incorporating small, sustainable habits whether it's adding more fibre, managing stress, or setting boundaries with your work and home life. Your gut plays a key role in your overall health, so taking steps to support it will benefit both your body and mind.

Remember: A healthy gut is a happy gut!

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