

THE WORLD WITHIN: UNDERSTANDING THE GUT MICROBIOME

Why Gut Health Matters

Research has shown that the microbiota within the gut directly affects various metabolic processes, including neural, immunological, and endocrine pathways (1). Extensive studies have also suggested a strong correlation between gut dysbiosis (an imbalance of “good” and “bad” microbes) and chronic conditions like hypertension, obesity, diabetes, cancer, CVD, and IBD (1).



However, studies also suggest that a healthy gut microbiome can have an opposing effect, reducing inflammation and supporting brain and immune health (2). This suggests that supporting the gut supports overall health and well-being. So, how do we improve our gut health? You likely don't need an expensive juice cleanse or an extreme dietary change. Still, there are several evidence-based strategies you can try today to begin cultivating a healthy gut microbiome.

Dietary Strategies

Fruits and vegetables are rich in polyphenols, which have anti-inflammatory and antioxidant properties (3).

Beans and legumes contain soluble fiber and prebiotics that feed probiotic populations in the existing gut microbiome (4).

Yogurt, kefir, and kombucha contain live probiotics that improve gut and immune function and may provide mental health benefits(4).

Fatty fish such as salmon and sardines are high in omega-3 fatty acids that reduce inflammation in the gut lining and encourage the growth of beneficial bacteria (3).

Consuming a diet rich in these foods supports gut flora and provides lasting health benefits.

Lifestyle recommendations

While I wholeheartedly believe that food is medicine, gut healing does not stop at a nutritious diet. Lifestyle factors such as sleep, physical activity, and stress also affect gut health and microbial balance (5).

Practical implementations for a gut-healthy lifestyle:

- Sleep: aim for 7–9 hours of quality sleep each night. It may help to establish a relaxing night routine and a consistent sleep-wake cycle (6).
- Stress: practicing meditation, breath work, gratitude, and mindfulness can help reduce stress. Additionally, being around community also supports mental health (7).
- Physical activity: this doesn't have to be extreme. Even a 20-minute walk a day is helpful to reduce stress, aid in weight management, and boost digestion (8).



Probiotics & Supplements:

Probiotics are live microorganisms that benefit the overall health of the gut (9). They only stay in the gut for a certain period of time, so they must be replenished frequently through diet and/ or supplementation to reap the full benefits (9). Fermented foods such as yogurt, kefir, miso, and kimchi contain probiotics (4). If you do not tolerate fermented foods well, a probiotic supplement that has been third-party tested may be an alternative.

Gut healthy recipe:

Mediterranean Salmon Bowl

- Season the salmon and vegetables of your choice with olive oil, lemon, garlic, a pinch of salt, pepper, and dried oregano (for the veggies, I recommend bell peppers, green beans, snap peas, and/ or carrots for a delicious crunch).
- Cook thoroughly, then serve over $\frac{3}{4}$ cup of cooked quinoa.
- You can even add roasted chickpeas or chopped green onions for even more fiber, flavor, and gut-loving compounds (4).

This recipe is high in fiber, omega-3s, prebiotics, and phytochemicals, which can be part of a healthy diet that supports the gut.



References:

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