

# Carbohydrates



## Health & Fitness

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## HEALTHY EATING by Cathy Court

# Eat right for healthy gut

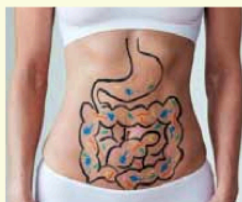
**G**ut health is a huge new area of scientific interest with many studies finding that the microbes living in our gut are more important to our health than we previously realised.

They show that a varied and healthy population of gut microbes is important for a healthy immune system, weight management and even reducing heart disease risk. In addition, there is a strong link between gut microbes and the brain, affecting mental health, brain functioning and predisposition to Parkinson's disease.

The good news is we can improve our gut microbiota easily by making changes to our diet, and what's more we get the benefit very quickly. Below are several proven ways to improve your gut health but I recommend you make one change at a time.

### 1. More plant-based foods

By far the easiest way to encouraging growth of healthy



microbes is to eat a good variety of plant-based foods. Try to include at least 30 different plant-based foods in your diet each week. Although this might sound a lot, it includes nuts, seeds, whole-grains and pulses, as well as fruit and vegetables. I found "Meat Free Mondays" helped me initially, and once you find vegetarian recipes you like, you'll be amazed at how quickly you can adapt to a more plant-based diet.

Eating more wholegrains such as wholemeal pasta, and less refined carbohydrates is important to encourage healthy microbial growth. Wholemeal pasta has improved

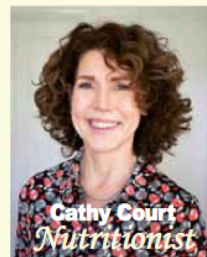
recently and I now love its nutty flavour. Also aim to include different coloured fruit and vegetables, high in "bug feeding" polyphenols.

### 2. Get cooking

Diets high in ultra-processed foods may decrease the diversity of gut bugs and early studies have found that they are linked to depression and other chronic diseases. If you are very reliant on ready meals try gradually increasing the number of meals cooked from basic ingredients throughout the week and avoiding processed snacks.

### 3. Prebiotic supplements

Prebiotics are ingredients that are not digested by us but encourage the growth of healthy gut bacteria. Some plant-based foods, such as oats and leeks contain a natural prebiotic, so the cheapest way to eat enough is to include a good variety of plant-based foods as mentioned above, but you can boost your intake using prebiotic powder supplements.



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Nutritionist

### 4. Probiotics & fermented foods

Probiotics are live bacteria included in some dairy products and supplements, which can give specific health benefits. Homemade fermented foods such as kefir and sauerkraut may have probiotic properties and there is plenty of anecdotal evidence that they help with gut health, especially around gastro-intestinal issues, although this has not proved yet by science.

• Cathy Court OBE MSc ANutr is a registered nutritionist, working with clients to improve their diets either online or from her base in Tring. For more information go to: [www.CathyCourtNutrition.com](http://www.CathyCourtNutrition.com).

# Heart health nutrition myths ... BUSTED by science!

The internet is awash with mis-information on what we should and shouldn't eat, and often it is in relation to heart health. This can be very difficult to navigate and lead to unhealthy eating patterns, so let's clarify the myths based on the best scientific evidence available and give you forward advice.

## Added to lower cholesterol ... Incorrect

A diet for several important functions including a healthy brain and for good brain function. In fact, what is important is the balance in our diet rather than the proportion of total fat. Fat is metabolised in the body in the same way. Saturated fats, found in meats, full fat dairy products, coconut milk and palm oil, from these such as cakes, biscuits and pastries, can raise cholesterol (LDL) in the blood. This in turn increases the risk of diseases including chronic heart disease, stroke and other health problems. On the other hand, unsaturated fats, found in nuts, seeds, and plants such as olive oil and rapeseed oil, avocado and oily fish, can decrease the blood levels of LDL and decrease the risk of heart disease. The UK and international guidelines reflect this by recommending a maximum intake of saturated fat to 10% of total energy intake for women and 30g for men, while keeping total fat at 30% of our total energy intake. Therefore, rather than swapping foods that are high in saturated fat for the same amount of fat, we should swap fats. For example, instead of fatty meats like sausages or