

HealthMatters

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The power of a healthy gut



Inside your gut right now there are literally trillions of bacteria, viruses, fungi, and other microorganisms. Officially known as the microbiome - it plays a surprisingly important role in your overall health.

Healthy gut balancing act

Gut health influences optimal digestion, efficient absorption of nutrients, and a strong immune system. It not only affects the bodily functions involved in the digestion of food, like nutrient absorption and bowel movements, but also effects mood and overall health.

The gut-brain connection

The enteric nervous system, or the second brain, is made of two layers of more than 100 million nerve cells that line your entire GI tract. While its main job is to help you digest food, it also communicates regularly with your brain through neurotransmitters. Neurotransmitters are the molecules used by the nervous system to transmit messages to neurons and muscles. How much - or how little - of these neurotransmitters you make may be due in large part to the trillions of microbes that live in your gut.

Researchers have found evidence that irritation in the gastrointestinal system may trigger mood changes, such as depression and anxiety.

Did you know | 70% of the immune system lives within the digestive tract.

So what causes the bad bugs to take over?

A few common habits may give these bad bacteria the upper hand. For one thing, a Western diet that is low in fiber and high in sugar, heavily processed foods and meat protein, leads to unfavorable shifts in the microbiome that promote inflammation. Studies have shown that if you have too much of these bad bacteria in your gut, you are more likely to have bowel-related disorders such as Crohn's disease, ulcerative colitis, and irritable bowel disease.

Why a healthy gut is important

"A healthy gut is really the key to a healthy body and mind." In the United States, around 60 to 70 million people suffer from digestive diseases that directly affect gut health.

Butterflies

We have all felt butterflies in our stomach before a big event. This is a perfect example of how our GI tract is sensitive to emotions.

The Second Brain

Your gut is often referred to as your "second brain," and for good reason: there is a clear connection between your brain and the gastrointestinal tract, known as the gut-brain axis. What is even more interesting is that the axis works both directions, meaning the brain can alter the function of the digestive tract, and the digestive tract can impact the brain.

Four ways to support gut health | The connection between our guts and our brains is affected by what we eat, how much we sleep, our stress levels, and our genetics. The latest science shows that the right food, fitness, and lifestyle choices can have a lasting impact on our digestive health.

1: Eat the right foods.

“Every piece of food we put into our mouth communicates to our genes, cells, organs and tissues, so every time we eat, we make a choice about what kind of communication we want to send and how we want to feel,” explains Michelle Babb, RD.

High Fiber: One of the most important habits for good gut health is making sure you are getting the recommended 25-35 grams of fiber each day. Fiber helps keep you regular, while feeding the good bacteria.

Elevate plants: Plants are full of fiber and probiotics, as well as polyphenols - antioxidants that are key to gut health.

One of the best ways to keep your gut microbiome healthy is through probiotics. These are the “good” bacteria like the ones already in your gut. The best way to get these is through foods, especially plants.

2: Get more sleep

A small study found that after just two nights of poor sleep, people had less beneficial bacteria in their gut. Aim for 7.5 hours each night, go to bed and wake at roughly the same time each day, and limit evening screen time.

3: Move more

Recent studies have shown that exercise can have a positive impact on gut health. Physical activity can help the gut by enriching the microflora of the gut, which contributes to reducing weight and lower inflammation.

4: Manage stress

One of the keys to better digestion is regular stress management. Reducing stress can lower inflammation in the gut, ease GI distress, and keep you nourished, since your body can focus on absorbing the nutrients you need.

Did you know | 90% of the body’s production of the mood-boosting hormone serotonin can be found in the gut.

Everyday habits matter

While there’s still so much researchers don’t know about the potential of our microbiomes, this much is clear right now: *Everyday habits matter.*

The main drivers of gut health change are shifts in stomach acid and “bad” bacteria in your digestive system. When gut health is good, you are less likely to experience damaging inflammation and will have a stronger immune system. If you have questions or concerns about your digestive health, your healthcare provider is here to help guide you as to the best colorectal screening for your needs. Building an open and honest relationship with your primary care physician is important to your good health!

Want to learn more?

Contact your Everside Health provider for more information and to discuss your individual habits today!

Visit eversidehealth.com
or call member services at **866-808-6005**

Sources: hopkinsmedicine.org, psychologytoday.com

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