

# Why Good Health Starts With Gut Health

With growing interest in the human digestive tract, many individuals are curious about overall gut health. The gastrointestinal tract starts at the mouth and continues all the way through the colon. Throughout the gastrointestinal tract are bacteria, fungi, and archaea, also known as the gut microbiota, which play a major role in digestive and total body health.<sup>1,2</sup> (When the term microbiome is used, the genomic information is included as well.) Microbiota have been associated with metabolic effects. For example, mice genetically susceptible to efficient energy storage have been shown to have significantly different microbiota than mice without that same susceptibility.<sup>3,4</sup> Human studies also showed similar findings in regards to gut microbiota alterations affecting host metabolism.<sup>5</sup> We are still early in understanding this phenomenon. How effectively the body uses glucose for fuel may be affected by microbiota as well.<sup>6</sup> In addition to gastrointestinal health and metabolic function, microbiota affect immune health.<sup>7</sup>

The gut microbiome evolves throughout life and is influenced by many different factors such as the environment, food habits, intestinal pH, microbial interactions, environmental temperature, stress, peristalsis, host secretions and immune response, and drug therapy, just to name a few.<sup>1</sup> Both external and internal factors listed above play an important role in maintaining or disrupting gut health.

The gut microbiota plays an essential role in metabolism, nutrition, and immune function.<sup>1,2</sup> In a healthy state, the gut microbiota takes on a variety of functions that humans are unable to do on their own.<sup>1</sup> When the microbiota homeostasis is disturbed, a cascade of changes can occur to balance the body.<sup>2</sup> Balanced gut microbiota is a part of many health care strategies.<sup>1</sup>

Below are a few tips to jumpstart the journey to a healthier gut:

- **Supplement with Digestive Enzymes:** Digestive enzymes degrade macronutrients into absorbable components. Supporting digestion can help relieve gas, bloating, or occasional indigestion.\* When choosing an enzyme, do your research. Different enzymes support the digestion of different types of foods. The right combination of enzymes are based on targeting the digestion of specific macronutrients. Many enzyme formulas contain a broad activity while others more specifically address fat, protein, or carbohydrate digestion.
- **Stay Hydrated:** Staying hydrated allows the body to flush out normally occurring intermediate metabolites of foods and keep waste moving throughout the digestive tract. Dehydration increases occasional constipation and bloating.<sup>8</sup> To make it simple, consume approximately half your body weight in ounces of water each day. This is not a perfect formula and may not be right for those who carry excess weight or have questionable kidney function.
- **Promote Detoxification and Elimination:** Exposure to foreign chemicals is everywhere. Consume organic and minimally processed food to help reduce exposure to toxins from the diet. Nutritional factors such as calcium, milk thistle, and dandelion can play a role in supporting healthy detoxification and elimination.\*
- **Exercise:** Exercise has been found to enhance the diversity of the gut microbiota. Incorporating physical activity into your daily life improves fitness, as well as contributes to microbiota balance.

- Incorporate prebiotics and probiotics into your diet: Supplementing with prebiotics and probiotics and consuming whole foods that naturally contain or promote the growth of health-promoting bacteria create positive changes within the gut microbiota and support overall health.\*<sup>2</sup> Lactobacillus are the primary types of probiotics found within the small intestines, and Bifidobacterium are the primary type found in the large intestines. Raw foods rich in prebiotics include chicory root, onions, garlic, artichokes, and barley. Fermented foods such as yogurt, kefir, sauerkraut, cabbage kimchee, and pickled ginger are great sources of live probiotic culture.<sup>2,10</sup>

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