

Gut Check: How Healthy Is Your Digestive Environment?



Could the cause — and maybe even the cure — for common ailments come from the bacteria in your gut?

The term “gut” has a few associations, including weight and intuition. But in this case, your gut is your digestive system. Inside this system are trillions of bacteria and other native organisms. Every person’s mix, called his or her “microbiome,” is unique.

Recent research points to the makeup of our microbiomes as being linked to our likelihood of developing conditions such as diabetes, obesity, depression and colon cancer. How direct this relationship is, how the microbiome connects to the brain and how much we’re able to alter the makeup of our microbiome is still being investigated.

While it may be easy to write off various ailments as the result of “bad bacteria,” there are steps you can take to improve the health of your gut. In fact, perhaps not coincidentally, many of the steps you would take are the same steps you would take when looking to improve your overall health.

- **Eat right:** A nutritious diet high in fiber-rich foods, like fruits, vegetables and whole grains can support bacterial diversity in your gut. Consuming high-fat, high-sugar or low-fiber foods can kill certain types of good bacteria.
- **Exercise:** Getting regular physical activity can encourage growth within your microbiome.
- **Get preventive care:** One in three adults between 50 and 75 years old do not receive recommended colorectal screenings. If you are in this age range, speak with your doctor to ensure you are up to date with preventive care services.
- **Talk to your doctor about probiotics:** Probiotics, also called “good bacteria,” mimic naturally occurring digestive-tract organisms. While the Food and Drug Administration has not endorsed any specific probiotic-related health claim, certain probiotics have been linked to positive outcomes for health conditions.

Source: WebMD®



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