

Here's to gut health!

The gut plays a vital role in strengthening our immune system. Here are eight tips to help you keep your gut healthy.

By Dr ZAITUN YASSIN & Dr ROSELINE YAP

THE gut is a term used to describe the intestinal tract – specifically, the stomach, small intestine and large intestine (also known as the colon).

The gut plays a major role in the digestion and absorption of nutrients, but it also participates in various processes within the body.

Taking control of your digestive health can help you improve your overall health and well-being.

Why taking care of your gut is important

The main function of the gut involves breaking down ingested food and absorbing nutrients.

However, the gut also helps to protect the body from harmful pathogens.

A healthy gut should have a good balance of bacteria, with a strong gut lining.

A strong gut lining acts as a barrier, ensuring that pathogens do not invade and make their way into the body.

In addition to strengthening the immune system of the human body, the gut is also the major store for the neurotransmitter, serotonin.

Serotonin plays an important role in making us feel happy, and it also helps to control our bowel movement.

Another abundant component of the gut is bacteria or gut microbiota.

Trillions of microorganisms work together in our gut to aid in food digestion, vitamin synthesis, protecting the intestinal lining and creating an environment that prohibits the overgrowth of bad bacteria.

Unhealthy habits can affect your gut health

Poor dietary and lifestyle habits may deteriorate the integrity of the gut and result in an imbalance of gut microbiota. Unhealthy lifestyle habits include:

- Unhealthy diet
- Excessive stress
- Sedentary lifestyle

In the long term, these unhealthy lifestyle habits may lead to various digestive disorders and diseases such as irritable bowel syndrome, inflammatory bowel disease, coeliac disease and colon cancer.

Often accompanying these diseases are symptoms such as persistent heartburn, constipation and diarrhoea.

Poor gut health has also been associated with non-communicable diseases such as diabetes mellitus, obesity and cardiovascular diseases.



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Tips to improve digestive health

Ways to improve, protect and preserve your digestive health include:

1. Practising a balanced, moderate and varied diet, and limiting foods high in fat and sugar.
2. Boosting dietary fibre intake by consuming more legumes, vegetables and fruits daily.
3. Drinking plenty of water daily.
4. Consuming probiotic-rich foods to help maintain a good balance of gut bacteria. Cultured milk drinks, yoghurt and fermented soy products (e.g. tempeh, miso soup) are good sources of probiotics.
5. Being physically active and maintaining a healthy body weight.
6. Quitting smoking.
7. Keeping your stress levels in check and getting adequate rest.
8. Going for regular health screenings to detect and prevent digestive disorders before they manifest.

These lifestyle modifications are achievable; however, you need to be committed to improving and maintaining a healthy digestive system.

Serious illnesses and diseases are a threat to you and your loved ones, so stop giving yourself excuses and start caring for your gut.

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