

Be Good to Your Gut

BY AMY GREENBURG

Here's how we can improve our gut health by making changes to our diet.

What does “gut health” actually mean? It refers to the balance of microorganisms that live in our digestive system. These microorganisms play an essential role in digestion, immune functions and brain-gut signalling. An imbalance of microbiota, or gut flora, is associated with a variety of medical problems including diabetes, high cholesterol, heart disease, inflammatory bowel conditions, autoimmune disorders and asthma, as well as food allergies and intolerances. Therefore, maintaining the right balance of gut microbiota is essential for physical and mental health, immunity and the prevention of many diseases.

Everyone's gut microbiota changes over time, as it's affected by age, environmental factors and diet. In fact, gastroenterologist DR ANDREA RAJNAKOVA says that every single thing we put into our bodies can significantly affect the makeup of our gut. Therefore, making adjustments to our diet (and avoiding antibiotics when they're not absolutely necessary!) can alter the microbiota for the better, and in a relatively short amount of time. If, on the other hand, you're looking to combat a disease or illness, long-term changes in the diet have proven to be most successful.

“Our overall health and body fitness is a combination of physical and mental health. The way we look and feel is the reflection of our lifestyle and diet,” says Dr Andrea.

She suggests three key changes:



#1 Work probiotics into your diet

Probiotics are live microorganisms that can improve or restore the gut flora, explains Dr Andrea. They can be found in fermented foods such as kimchi, sauerkraut, kombucha, tempeh and miso, and fermented dairy products such as yoghurt, kefir and buttermilk.

To boost the beneficial bacteria in your gut, you can also take probiotic dietary supplements, which can help reduce gastrointestinal discomfort, improve immune health, and relieve constipation. But, since different types of probiotics may have different effects, it's best to talk to your doctor about choosing the one that's right for you.

#2 Eat a diverse range of foods

A diverse microbiota is considered to be a healthy one. And, a well-balanced diet consisting of different food types can help with that. For a healthy and varied diet that includes all the necessary nutrients, Dr Andrea recommends: