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How to Support a Healthy Gut Microbiome

Nurture your gut microbiome and your health with our top diet and lifestyle tips



What happens in the gut, doesn't just stay in the gut

The gut microbiome can produce substances that influence not only your gut health but also your nervous, metabolic and immune systems.



How to support a healthy microbiome

You can support your health and wellbeing by encouraging beneficial microbes in your gut to thrive, whilst 'crowding out' any less desirable microbes that may have taken up residence.

There are several diet and lifestyle factors you can adopt to support the health of your microbiome. Prior to following any of the below tips, we recommend talking with your practitioner about which options will best suit you, your health goals, and your gut microbiome. That way they can ensure any changes align with your personalised treatment plan.

Eat a variety of plants, mix it up as best you can!

We all need to feed and nourish the beneficial microbes living inside our gut. Increasing the variety of plants in your diet will ensure that your microbiome has plenty of different fibres to use as fuel. The trick is to add more plants in, even in small quantities, instead of removing foods entirely. In fact, when you eat similar foods every day, you tend to nourish the same types of gut microbes, and this can limit the overall diversity of the microbiome. We want a variety of different microbial species in our gut microbiome for optimal microbiome health.



**A diverse microbiome is
associated with better health**

Aim to eat 30 or more plants each week. Use the plant points tracker to help you keep count!



Engage a fruit and vegetable box service, this is a great way to regularly get more variety delivered right to your home!

- Try adding herbs and spices to your meals.
 - Sprinkle coriander onto your next curry.
 - Add some basil to your next pasta dish.
 - Pick some rosemary and add to roasted potatoes.
- Choose variations of the same fruit or vegetable.
 - Go for purple sweet potatoes over the orange variety.
 - Eat yellow capsicum over red or green.
- Add legumes to your meals.
 - Add kidney beans to a chilli con carne; eat hummus or falafel, add lentils to stews or soups.
- Eat dishes from a range of cuisines.
 - Create a meal plan that includes a mix of meals from around the world, this is a great way to get different vegetables into the diet.
- Improve the plant power of your morning smoothie.
 - Include a new fruit or vegetable.
 - Add a small teaspoon of green banana flour to boost the resistant starch.
- Change up your bread choices.
 - Each week select a different bread or cracker to enjoy. Rotate between dark rye, seeded bread or wholemeal varieties.



Buy mixed nuts or make your own nut mixture.

- Eat a small handful of mixed nuts as a snack or add to a bowl of oats.



Fermented foods

To increase the diversity of your microbiome, consider adding more fermented foods into your daily diet. Fermented foods use a traditional preserving process that not only extends the shelf-life of the food, but also boosts it with beneficial microbes.

Fermented foods, when prepared appropriately (not heat treated), contain live bacteria and may assist in increasing the diversity of gut microbes.



Choose a good quality yoghurt or kefir by looking for options with the least number of added ingredients or making your own.



- Add a side of kimchi or sauerkraut to your next meal.
- Order kombucha instead of soft drink or wine when next out to dinner.
- Use tempeh in your next stir-fry.

Prebiotics


Prebiotics provide food for the beneficial microbes living in your gut. While we cannot digest prebiotics, certain beneficial microbes can. When microbes feed on prebiotics, they can produce compounds that are beneficial to your gut and overall health.

There are many types of prebiotics, some names you may or may not recognise. They include inulin, fructooligosaccharides (FOS), galactooligosaccharides (GOS), resistant starch, beta-glucan, lactulose, glucomannan, acacia gum and partially hydrolysed guar gum (PHGG). Whilst you can find a variety of prebiotics in foods, your healthcare practitioner may also utilise targeted prebiotic supplements to improve your microbiome and to ensure you are getting sufficient amounts of prebiotics.

- Cooked and cooled potato, rice or pasta are high in resistant starch.
 - Try cooking potato, rice or pasta, then placing it in the fridge to cool and make into a salad the next day.

- Beta-glucan can be found in your daily bowl of oat porridge.

Pearled barley is also a good source and provides a nice nutty flavour with a chewy texture when added to soups and salads.

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- Pulses such as chickpeas, borlotti beans, green lentils, red kidney beans and split peas are packed full of the prebiotic GOS.
 - These are a great addition to plant-based meals to increase both prebiotic and protein intake.



- Increase prebiotic rich vegetables in your diet such as Jerusalem and globe artichoke, red onion, broccoli stalks, leek and asparagus.
 - Jerusalem artichoke is a rich source of FOS and inulin. It works well in soups, stews, salads and dips.



Probiotics

There is a large variety of probiotic supplements available. It is important to use the correct strain of probiotic based on your unique situation. We recommend speaking to your healthcare practitioner before supplementing with probiotics.

Sleep

Quality sleep is a foundation of good health. Research has found a positive link between gut microbiome diversity and sleep quality. Furthermore, poor sleep may contribute to an increase in gut microbes associated with poor health.

- Aim for 7-9 hours of uninterrupted sleep per night.
 - Establish a regular time to go to bed, preferably before 10pm.
- Shift work can wreak havoc on your circadian rhythm, which is essential for good health.
 - Try to increase your exposure to natural light during your awake times and darkness during your sleep times.
- Create a calm sleep environment that is used only for sleep.
 - Remove devices and televisions from your sleep environment.



Exercise during the day can help with sleep at night.

Reduce stimulating activities too close to your bedtime.

Avoid eating heavy meals or sugary foods close to bedtime.





Stress*

Did you know that people with higher levels of stress show differences in the types of microbes living in their gut? Stress also impacts other functions of the gut which can lead to wider health problems. You may have heard of the gut-brain connection. We are learning that the types of microbes living in your gut can influence how your body responds to stress-related conditions.

- Colouring before bed can promote relaxation, reduce stress, and improve sleep quality by calming the mind and helping you unwind. It also encourages mindfulness, making it an excellent pre-sleep activity.
 - Spend 20 minutes each night colouring.
- Mindfulness and meditation have been shown to regulate how you respond to stress.
 - If you are new to meditation, start with a short, guided meditation which are available on all streaming services.
- You are what you eat. Food can influence how your body responds to stress.
 - Follow our nutrition strategies to feed the beneficial microbes in your gut.
- Gut-directed hypnotherapy (GDH) is a type of therapy that uses hypnosis to provide symptom relief for those who experience disorders of the gut-brain interaction such as irritable bowel syndrome (IBS).
 - GDH can help improve the communication between the gut and brain, which may help to improve IBS symptoms such as pain, bloating, nausea and satisfaction with stool form and frequency.



Manage stress with daily exercise and movement.

Exercise is also beneficial to the microbial community living in your gut.

*If you are experiencing significant emotional difficulties, you should contact your GP for a referral to a qualified professional. BeyondBlue can also provide support to help you achieve your best possible mental health. **BeyondBlue free support services can be reached at 1300 224 636.**

Nature time

Increasing your exposure to environmental microbes can help support a more diverse balance of microbes in your microbiome. Living in a rural area or access to a yard with a variety of vegetation may also aid microbiome diversity, with rural environments providing exposure to more beneficial microbes than urban environments.

- Get in the garden more and grow some of your own produce.
- Go for more picnics in your local park or take a trip to the countryside.
- Try holidaying at farm stays or near forests.



Swim in the ocean or walk bare foot on the grass outside.





Get a pet

Living with furry friends may support a more diverse microbial environment within your home. For instance, the dust of homes with dogs showed different and rarer microbial species than those without dogs.

- Play with your pets. They will love the extra human attention and your gut microbiome will be happy too.
- Take your dog for a walk and visit your local greenspace, park or an area with diverse vegetation.
- Support a local animal welfare charity and foster dogs or other animals until they can be rehomed.



If owning a pet is not for you, try pet sitting or volunteer at animal shelters.



Plant points tracker

How many different plants do you eat in one week?

Each time you add plants to your meals and snacks, write it in the box below and notice how many different plant foods you typically consume in a week!

Aim for 30-40 different plants!



1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16
17	18	19	20	21	22	23	24
25	26	27	28	29	30	31	32
33	34	35	36	37	38	39	40



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