

Gut Check!

(1) Your digestive system is always at work. (2) When you scarf down a pizza, it takes a twisty trip that starts with being chewed up and ends with you going to the bathroom. (3) Pizza can upset your stomach if you are not too careful with the grease.

(4) The most extensive component of the digestive system is the gastrointestinal (GI) tract. (5) The gastrointestinal tract is a long, muscular tube that runs from your mouth to your rectum. (6) It's over 25 feet long and works with other parts of the digestive system to break that pizza and soda down into smaller particles of nutrients. (7) Blood absorbs these nutrients and carries them throughout the body to be used for energy, growth, and repair.

(8) With such a long GI road, it's common to run into bumps or potholes. (9) About 50 to 70 million Americans are affected by diseases in the digestive tract, like gastroesophageal reflux disease (GERD) or irritable bowel syndrome (IBS). (10) GERD occurs when your stomach acid comes back up into your throat. (11) This causes unpleasant symptoms like heartburn and indigestion. (12) IBS constitutes a variety of symptoms like pain in the abdomen, constipation, diarrhea, and changes in bowel habits. (13) People with IBS often live with shame. (14) Many more people have other digestive problems, like bloating and stomach pain.

(14) There are many factors that can impact gut health. (15) How your body's built, your family and genetic history, how you manage stress, and what you eat can all affect your gut. (16) There are a lot of lifestyle-related GI issues, and there are often no quick fixes for that. (17) In general, people do well when they practice healthy habits.

(18) Research has found that people who have early life stress are more likely to develop IBS. (19) This increased risk for IBS went down when people confided in someone they trust about the stress they experienced.