

FOOD & MOOD

COACHING

LOVE YOUR GUT FOR HEALTH & WEIGHT MANAGEMENT

“Good health begins in the gut.” No doubt you have heard this saying before. Health professionals agree that the gut is fundamental to both physical and mental health.

When we talk about ‘gut health’, we are referring more broadly to the role of the gut as a whole system. Having an overall healthy gut supports immune health, metabolic health, weight management and as numerous studies are now uncovering, mood health, which by and large relate to a healthy gut microbiome. For a refresher, check out the ‘Gut Health’ resource from week 2.

This resource will focus on optimal digestion, which is a significant factor in overall gut health.

The process of digestion begins in the mouth where food is mechanically broken down and then transported to our stomach to be further broken down. It is then ready to be absorbed in the small intestine so that the nutrients pass through to our bloodstream to be used by our body. The colon or large intestine is responsible for the excretion of our wastes and houses the largest percentage of our gut microbiome.

What does good digestion look like?

A healthy digestive system has different characteristics, namely:

- + Healthy teeth, gums and tongue
- + Safe transport of food towards the stomach
- + Able to produce digestive enzymes to break down the food properly
- + Has a healthy population of gut microbiome and prevention of harmful bacteria growth
- + Healthy gut barrier or lining in the small intestine
- + Good bowel transit time and elimination of toxins

With the gut being in a healthy state, it can manifest through our body by:

- + Having better energy levels
- + Good immune response
- + Reduced inflammation and infection
- + Clear skin and stronger hair
- + Regular bowel movement (3x a week to 2-3x a day)
- + Healthy stool appearance (type 3 or 4 in the Bristol stool chart)

How can we achieve optimal digestion?

A diet that is rich in vegetables, fruits, healthy oils, wholegrains, legumes, lean meats and nuts supports a well-functioning gut. Natural and clean foods are easily broken down and can be absorbed efficiently by our gut. High fibre foods, proper hydration and regular exercise aids in regular bowel movement for the elimination of toxic substances. Eating the right foods and observing how much your intake is are among key measures for a good weight management program.



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On the other hand, a diet that is high in saturated fats, fatty meats, refined sugars, additives and preservatives may lead to poor gut health and weight gain. Other factors like chronic stress, smoking, alcohol and substance abuse also contribute to poor digestion.

One sign of poor digestion is **bloating**. It is the feeling of your tummy being very full and it can say a lot about the state of your gut. It can be caused by overeating, high intake of salty foods and refined carbohydrates, eating too quickly and drinking carbonated drinks.

But being always bloated may also stem from being constipated, having a lot of gas, having abdominal cramps, an irritable bowel or diarrhea, food intolerance, hormones or monthly period and weight gain.

If you are feeling most of these symptoms, it is better to consult with your accredited dietitian or physician before going under any treatment.

Some signs of poor gut health are chronic fatigue or low energy levels, headaches, migraines, inflammation, inadequate sleep, unclear skin, acid reflux, joint pains, anxiety and depression.

Here is a table of foods that are considered gut-loving or gut healthy:

GUT LOVING FOODS	
Vegetables	Dark green leafy vegetables like spinach, kale, rocket and silverbeet, garlic, onions, leeks, asparagus, peas, Brussels sprouts, ginger, Jerusalem artichokes, sweet corn, dandelion greens, seaweed, chicory root, kimchi, sauerkraut, pickles, miso, tofu, tempeh
Legumes and beans	Chickpeas, lentils and red beans
Fruits	Avocados, bananas, berries and plantains
Nuts and seeds	Almonds, chia seeds and flaxseed
Wholegrains	Cooked rice, oats, barley
Dairy	Yoghurt, kefir and aged cheese
Fish	Oily fish like salmon and mackerel
Others	Olive oil, dark chocolate, apple cider vinegar, kombucha

