

Q.

How can I improve my gut health?

A.

Gurgle, gurgle, burp, and a trip to the bathroom. If that's your normal pattern throughout the day, your stomach is trying to send you a message.

Translation: "Something's not right. I'm having a hard time digesting the food you just ate."

About 70 million people suffer from digestive problems in the U.S. And these problems show up in the form of:¹

- Stomach aches
- Constipation
- Diarrhea
- Heartburn, and other symptoms

In some cases, chronic digestive problems can be a sign of serious health problems, and you should see a doctor. But for a lot of people, digestive discomfort is a result of poor food choices and lifestyle habits.

Ever had one of those I-shouldn't-have-eaten-that-moments? If it's bad enough, you might steer clear of that food for a while. But if you really want better digestive health, give your gut some love

Here are five ways to improve digestion.



1. Eat healthy foods

This includes fruits, vegetables, whole grains, legumes, nuts, and seeds. These nutrient-dense foods support gut health and digestion.

Fermented foods with probiotics like sauerkraut, miso, tempeh, and kimchi may also improve digestion.

In case you're wondering, burgers, fries, soda, and pizza have the opposite effect.²

2. Drink more water

Aim for at least 64 ounces of water a day. Water helps your body digest food, absorb nutrients, and make bowel movements easier.

3. Reduce stress

There's a direct link between your gut and your brain. When you're stressed out, your stomach can be, too.³ Find healthy ways to handle stress like taking a walk, meditation, or deep breathing.

4. Avoid red meat

Better digestion isn't the only reason to avoid red meat. It's been linked

ASK THE *Wellness* DOCTOR

to diabetes, heart disease, and certain types of cancer. Research shows red meat can also damage the large intestines.⁴

5. Be more active

About 80 percent of all adults don't get enough exercise (at least 30 minutes a day).⁵ It's a risk factor for obesity and a long list of health problems, including poor digestion. Being active helps improve gut bacteria used to digest food.

Want to improve your gut health. Make small changes to your diet and lifestyle habits. You'll feel better, and your stomach will be happier.

References

1. National Institutes of Health. (2017). Keeping your gut in check. From: <https://tinyurl.com/2pszmx42>
2. Jardine, M. (2022). Gut bacteria. Physicians Committee for Responsible Medicine. From: <https://tinyurl.com/2e3tsnb3>
3. Madison, A., et al. (2019). From: Stress, depression, diet, and the gut microbiota: human-bacteria interactions at the core of psychoneuroimmunology and nutrition. *Current Opinion in Behavioral Sciences*, 28: 105-110. From: <https://tinyurl.com/4mjmhzhj>
4. Cao, Y., et al. (2018). Meat intake and risk of diverticulitis among men. *Gut*, 67(3): 466-472. From: <https://tinyurl.com/3we7392d>
5. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. (2021). Exercise or physical activity. From: <https://tinyurl.com/m245b2xt>