



# gut HEALTH

THE COMPLETE PATIENT GUIDE

Pelvic  Sanity





## healthy gut

The gastrointestinal system plays a major role in a happy, healthy lifestyle. It's the source of all our life-giving nutrients, our energy, our vitality. A well-balanced gut supports a healthy immune system. In fact, the gastrointestinal tract plays such an important role it is often referred to as the "second brain". About 95% of serotonin, the neurotransmitter responsible for mood stabilization, is found in the gut. [A healthy gut means a happy you!](#)

# The System

- MOUTH
- ESOPHAGUS
- STOMACH
- SMALL INTESTINE
- LARGE INTESTINE
- RECTUM
- SALIVARY GLANDS
- PANCREAS
- LIVER
- GALL BLADDER



# how it works

The gastrointestinal tract, comprised of the stomach and intestines, is responsible for digestion of food, absorption of nutrients and removal of waste from our bodies. The digestive system begins at the [mouth](#) where the first stages of food breakdown occur. Once food is chewed and swallowed it makes it way down the [esophagus](#) to the [stomach](#) for further breakdown.

From there it travels through the [small intestine](#), where the majority of nutrient absorption occurs.

Nutrients are then passed through blood vessels into the bloodstream for distribution to the tissues of the body. Undigested food and waste continue through the [large intestine](#) for further absorption of nutrients and water. The remaining waste is excreted out the [rectum](#), where the [pelvic floor muscles](#) relax to allow it to exit.

The other organs that assist digestion in our bodies are the [salivary glands](#), [pancreas](#), [liver](#), and [gall bladder](#).

# gut symptoms

The digestive system is a complex one, and has a major influence on the rest of the body. But many of us may not realize when our system isn't working as well as it should. Common GI symptoms include:

- 
- CONSTIPATION
  - DIARRHEA
  - BLOATING
  - ABDOMINAL CRAMPS
  - BELCHING OR FLATULENCE
  - NAUSEA
  - ACID REFLUX OR HEARTBURN
- 










# clues to bowel health

Often the first sign of GI issues can be found in the stool. The shape, consistency, texture, color, and time tell us a lot about how our GI system is working.

The Bristol Stool Chart is a great reference. Ideally, we would have [Type 3](#) and [Type 4](#) stool. The optimal bowel movement should be painless, take about a minute, not require straining, and leave you feeling completely emptied.

[Types 1 and 2](#) suggest constipation, while [Types 5, 6 and 7](#) imply varying levels of diarrhea.

## Bristol Stool Chart

Type 1		Separate hard lumps, like nuts (hard to pass)
Type 2		Sausage-shaped but lumpy
Type 3		Like a sausage but with cracks on its surface
Type 4		Like a sausage or snake, smooth and soft
Type 5		Soft blobs with clear-cut edges (passed easily)
Type 6		Fluffy pieces with ragged edges, a mushy stool
Type 7		Watery, no solid pieces. <b>Entirely Liquid</b>



# tools for gut health

- DIETARY CHANGES
- SUPPLEMENTS
- EXERCISE
- SLEEP
- STRESS REDUCTION
- PHYSICAL THERAPY

# after your diet

**Get more fiber.** Fiber helps food pass through the intestines, keeping us regular and preventing hard, painful stool. It's found in fruits, vegetables, and whole grains. There are two main types - soluble and insoluble - that have different benefits for the digestive system.

- **Soluble fiber** absorbs water within the digestive tract, forming a gel-like substance that softens stool for easier passage. It supports the good bacteria found within the gut, and slows the absorption of cholesterol and sugar into the bloodstream. Soluble fiber is found in avocados, beans, and oats.
- **Insoluble fiber** doesn't absorb water and isn't broken down by the GI system. It adds bulk to our waste, promoting more regular bowel movements. Vegetables, fruits, and whole grains are high in insoluble fiber.

**Identify and eliminate food allergies.** Many of us may be allergic to specific foods or drinks, even if we are unaware of it. If you're having GI issues, a doctor can test you for various food intolerances.

**Reduce processed foods, sugar, and meat.** Alcohol and caffeine can also have a negative impact on bowel health. If you notice that curtailing these improves your symptoms, they may be an underlying culprit.

# avoid pesticides

A shocking amount of our food contains pesticides - according to one report, 70% of all produce contained significant levels of pesticides. On average, each American has traces of 29 different pesticides in our body at any one time.

While we don't know exactly whether - or how much - these pesticides affect us, we do know that occupations exposed to high pesticide concentrations have experienced significant health concerns related to pesticides.

The Environmental Working Group posts lists of produce with the highest and lowest amounts of pesticide residue every year.

The “**Dirty Dozen**”, or produce with highest amounts of pesticide for 2018, include strawberries, spinach, potatoes and apples. To reduce exposure, it is best to invest in organic options for these.

The “**Clean Fifteen**”, items with the least pesticide residue, include foods like avocados, asparagus, papaya and cauliflower. Conventional produce is acceptable for this list.



## water intake

Drinking enough water is one of the most important things you can do for your gut health. It not only helps keep everything moving, but fluid also keeps the intestines healthy and flexible as well.

A good rule of thumb for water intake is that you should drink half your body weight daily (in ounces). So a 150-lb person should be drinking at least 75 ounces daily. You can also just let your thirst be your guide!

# supplements

Several supplements may be able to improve overall gut health.

**Prebiotics** promote the growth of healthy bacteria in the gut. They can be taken as supplements, or found in foods like leeks, asparagus, onions, and garlic.

**Probiotics** actually contain the healthy bacteria essential to gut health. Foods like yogurt, kombucha, soybeans, and any pickled foods contain probiotics. You can also take these as a supplement - we recommend [Thorne's FloraMend Prime Probiotic](#).

**Fiber** is important to regular bowel movements, and can be taken as a supplement if you're not getting enough fiber from your diet. Glucomannan is a common type of fiber used as a dietary supplement.

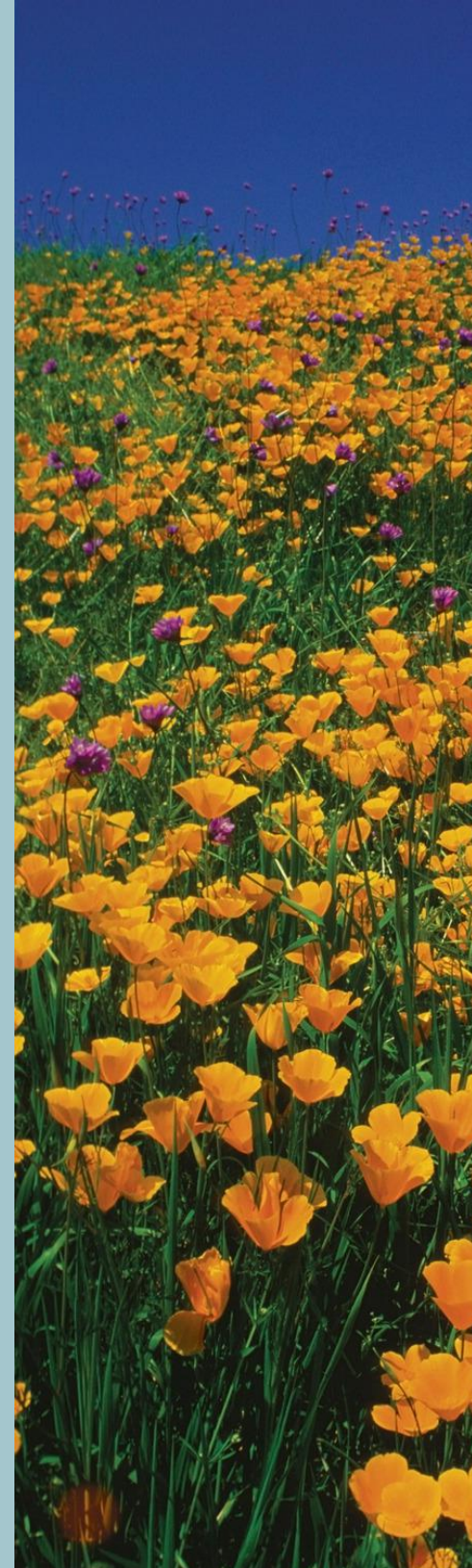
**Omega-3 fish oils** can reduce systemic inflammation.

**Magnesium** is a mineral that can have a laxative effect if you are dealing with constipation.

*Not enough high quality evidence is present to fully support use of supplements for treatment of any symptoms or conditions, but preliminary research suggests that they may help to decrease GI issues. Before taking any supplements, always consult your physician. Links may be affiliate links, where the price you pay doesn't change but we receive small commission from your purchase.*

# improve gut health with....

- **Exercise** - Get moving! Being active keeps your digestive tract moving as well. It doesn't need to be a lot - take a walk after meals to reduce bloating spark your digestion.
- **Sleep** - In addition to all the other important aspects of sleep - improving mood, lowering stress and blood pressure, boosting memory and cognitive function - sleep also plays an important role in the digestive system. Better sleep may allow the body the downtime it needs to process food and repair cells, and improved sleep quality has even been associated with lower weight!
- **Stress Management** - Stress actively interferes with the digestive system. When we're stressed, the body believes we're in a state of emergency and prioritizes short-term survival over long-term projects (like digesting food). Stress is linked to ulcers and heartburn, diarrhea, abdominal cramps, and constipation. Chronic stress can even imbalance the beneficial gut flora, and results in higher levels of inflammation that can also cause digestive issues. Dealing with this stress can have a huge impact on gut health!



A person is lying on their back, receiving a physical therapy massage on their back. The therapist's hands are visible, applying pressure to the lower back area. The person is wearing a blue long-sleeved shirt.

# physical therapy

PT CAN HELP...

CONSTIPATION

BLOATING

ABDOMINAL PAIN

SCAR ADHESIONS

BOWEL CONTROL

Physical therapy can be an important tool for managing digestive health. The [pelvic floor muscles](#) are responsible for keeping us continent. They're turned on all day, and have to relax in order to allow us to defecate.

Often, these pelvic floor muscles can be overly tight and difficult to relax. This can cause constipation, the feeling of an incomplete empty, or make going to the bathroom difficult or painful. [Pelvic floor physical therapy](#) can restore these muscles to their normal function, allowing them to relax so a complete void can take place.

Pelvic PT can also address any abdominal issues that may be restricting the GI tract. [Scar tissue adhesion](#) can be a common culprit, contributing to constipation, abdominal pain, and bloating. Fascial tension can also cause discomfort and contribute to a bloated feeling, which can be eased with physical therapy.

# common dietary restrictions

## dairy-free

Many people struggle to fully digest the sugar (lactose) in dairy products, leading to GI symptoms like diarrhea, gas, and bloating after consuming dairy. Dairy can also cause additional inflammation within the body, so anti-inflammatory diets often restrict dairy intake.

## gluten-free

Gluten is a protein in wheat, found in almost all processed foods. While there is contradictory research on non-Celiac gluten sensitivity, going gluten-free results in a healthier diet as processed foods are eliminated. Patients can see significant benefits in GI health and pain reduction with a gluten-free approach.

## elimination diet

One of the most powerful tools for discovering the cause of GI (and other!) symptoms, an elimination diet removes common irritants. These can include gluten, dairy, sugar, alcohol, caffeine, soy, or other possible irritants. You observe how your symptoms change without these possible irritants. Then, you begin slowly adding these items back into your diet one at a time - it quickly becomes apparent if there is a food trigger for your symptoms!



## The big takeaways

There is a lot you can do to improve your gastrointestinal health. Feeling lethargic bloated or gassy are some indicators your system is off. You now have the tools to recognize an unhealthy gut and some ways to correct it.

Eat right, stay active, get enough sleep and manage stress to keep that digestive tract moving smoothly!

# references

- Yang T, Matthews S, Chen V. Stochastic Variability in Stress, Sleep Duration, and Sleep Quality Across the Distribution of Body Mass Index: Insights from Quantile Regression. *Int J Behav Med*. 2013;21(2):282-291. doi:10.1007/s12529-013-9293-2.
- Blaxton J, Bergeman C, Whitehead B, Braun M, Payne J. Relationships Among Nightly Sleep Quality, Daily Stress, and Daily Affect. *The Journals of Gerontology Series B: Psychological Sciences and Social Sciences*. 2017
- A. Haycox, T. Einarson, A. Eggleston. The Health Economic Impact of Upper Gastrointestinal Symptoms in the General Population: Results from the Domestic/International Gastroenterology Surveillance Study (DIGEST). *Scandinavian Journal of Gastroenterology* Volume 34 (231), 1999
- Stanghellini V. Three-Month Prevalence Rates of Gastrointestinal Symptoms and the Influence of Demographic Factors: Results from the Domestic/International Gastroenterology Surveillance Study (DIGEST). *Scandinavian Journal of Gastroenterology*, Volume 34, 1999
- Lewis M., Palsson O, Whitehead W, Tilburg, M. Prevalence of Functional Gastrointestinal Disorders in Children and Adolescents. *The Journal of Pediatrics*, Volume 177, 2016
- Branham M. *The Poop Scoop: What The Color Of Your Stool Might Be Telling You*. Mandatory. 2018
- Bristol stool chart · Faecal · Continence Foundation of Australia. *Continenceorgau*. 2018
- Camilleri M. Serotonin in the gastrointestinal tract. *Current Opinion in Endocrinology, Diabetes and Obesity*. 2009;16(1):53-59
- Berkey CS, Rockett HR, Willett WC, et al. Milk, dairy fat, dietary calcium, and weight gain: a longitudinal study of adolescents. *Arch Pediatr Adolesc Med*. 2005 Jun; 159(6):543-50.
- Biesiekierski J, Peters S, Newham E, Rosella O, Muir G, and Gibson P. No Effects of Gluten in Patients With Self-Reported Non-Celiac Gluten Sensitivity After Dietary Reduction of Fermentable, Poorly Absorbed, Short-Chain Carbohydrates. *Gastroenterology* 145(2), 320-8, 2013
- Gordon, B., Shorter, B., Sarcona, A., & Moldwin, R. M. (2015). Nutritional considerations for patients with interstitial cystitis/bladder pain syndrome. *Journal of the Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics*, 115(9), 1378-1379.
- Davis, S. (2016). Reversal of Irritable Bowel Syndrome, Sleep Disturbance, and Fatigue With an Elimination Diet, Lifestyle Modification, and Dietary Supplements: A Case Report. *Integrative Medicine: A Clinician's Journal*, 15(5), 60.
- Kennedy, D. A., Lewis, E., Cooley, K., & Fritz, H. (2014). An exploratory comparative investigation of Food Allergy/Sensitivity Testing in IBS (The FAST Study): A comparison between various laboratory methods and an elimination diet. *Advances in integrative medicine*, 1(3), 124-130.



# Pelvic Sanity

Bonnie Lasher, PT, DPT

[www.pelvicsanity.com](http://www.pelvicsanity.com)

