



## Keeping your gut happy



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Many health problems begin, or are worsened, by what's going on in the gut. Leaky gut and dysbiosis are two of the different malfunctions that can occur. They are separate conditions that can frequently occur together.

### Leaky gut

Leaky gut refers to a gut lining that is too permeable; like a tea bag that has small tears in it. To get nutrients from our food our microvilli, which are tiny little finger-like projections in the gut lining, filter and absorb broken down food. Nutrients are absorbed into the bloodstream through the gut mucosa (the first layer of cells in the digestive tract). Sometimes the villi are damaged, or the gut lining is compromised for a number of reasons that can include stress, medications, alcohol, and inflammation. Then, the tight junctions which are like gate keepers in the gut lining keeping the cells tightly packed together, can fail and allow particles direct access into our blood stream. They bypass the filtering process, like leaves floating in our tea.

Our liver and immune system don't like things going into our bloodstream unfiltered, particularly not improperly digested compounds, or microbial pathogens such as bacteria and viruses. Inflammation inevitably occurs as a result of leaky gut. The compound itself, and/or the body's reaction can be the problem. Reduced nutrition due to compromised absorption in a damaged gut will also contribute to unwellness.

It's a vicious cycle, since lack of certain nutrients can also cause tight junction failure! A whole range of health issues including schizophrenia, coeliac disease, irritable bowel syndrome, obesity, diabetes, skin problems and allergic responses are linked to leaky gut.

### Dysbiosis

Dysbiosis is when the balance of micro-organisms (particularly bacteria but also fungi and viruses) in our gut errs on the 'unfriendly' or imbalanced side. We all house bacteria, both inside and out. When the different types of microorganisms are in balance they protect us against disease, aid digestion and do other useful things. However, in a state of dysbiosis, the balance of bacteria is not conducive to good health and problems can ensue. Some of these problems, such as candida and clostridium difficile infection can contribute to the development of, or worsening of leaky gut. Other symptoms of dysbiosis such as poor digestion, bloating and allergies are common to both of these health problems.

### How can I look after my gut?

Dietary and lifestyle factors and infection are all implicated in the development of leaky gut and dysbiosis. Physical, mental and emotional stress can increase the production of digestion-disrupting stress hormones such as adrenaline and cortisol, which can lead to a compromised gut lining and poor digestive health. So too can certain medications and vaccinations. Food intolerances can worsen leaky gut.

Look after your gut by limiting caffeine and alcohol and stopping smoking. Include relaxation, eating in a calm environment and including fermented foods such as sauerkraut. Eat more omega 3 (oily fish and walnuts) for tissue repair and to reduce inflammation. Consume lots of whole foods, and avoid processed low fibre foods which



have calories but are nutrient poor. Reduce wheat and dairy consumption and increase plant-based foods, with lots of leafy green veg. Drinking cabbage juice is very gut healing! Eating organically can help protect the gut by reducing toxic irritants.

Next time you make out your shopping list, remember to think about keeping your gut happy! If required, enlist the support of a naturopathic practitioner who can help identify triggers, and who will be able to suggest appropriate dietary and lifestyle changes.

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