

THE GUT CONNECTION

FEED YOUR GUT

Research on the link between the gut and overall health including immune health and emotional wellbeing is growing. Digestive wellness is becoming a nutritional motivator for many of us- research carried out in 2018 across Ireland and the UK highlighted that 69% of the population has experienced some sort of persistent gut complaint at some point in their lives*.

The human gut contains trillions of gut bacteria, which collectively make up the gut microbiota. Through a series of complex events, the microbes living in your gut influence how your body processes the food. And in turn, the food can change the microbial community living inside you. The products of these diet-microbiota interactions can profoundly change your health. 'You are what you eat' has never been so true!

So what can you do to keep your gut in balance? It is almost completely a matter of how you eat.

- Eating regularly and slowly, with smaller, more frequent meals
- Ensure there are Gut-Friendly foods in your diet (whole grains, fibre, low-fat meat and fish, good fats and oils, and fermented dairy products)
- Aim for 5 portions of fruit and vegetables a day – keep them varied
- And don't forget to drink up: stick to water, however, and stay away from caffeinated, sugary, and alcoholic drinks.
- Practice a healthy lifestyle: exercise regularly and abstain from smoking.
- Maintain a healthy body weight.

Fibre and the Gut

Fibre is an essential nutrient in the maintenance of a healthy gut microbiota and helps improve the transit of material through the large bowel, preventing constipation. Foods rich in fibre not only add bulk to your meal aiding that feeling of being fuller for longer, but also release sugar slowly for sustained energy release.

Each 7g increase in fibre can lower your risk of cardiovascular disease, colon cancer, stroke and diabetes (Scientific Advisory Commission on Nutrition, 2015). Body weight, blood pressure and total cholesterol were also found to be significantly lower in those consuming higher fibre intakes.

So where do we find it?

Dietary fibre comes from plant sources and cannot be digested by the human body. It is found most commonly in wholegrain foods such as breads/pasta/rice, fruit and vegetables, nuts and seeds and in cereals fortified with fibre.

And how much do we need?

The recommended fibre intake is 25- 30g according to the Scientific Advisory Commission on Nutrition (SACN). For children, the requirement is age + 5g fibre per day (for example, an 11-year-old child requires 11 + 5g fibre per day = 16g fibre).

Why do wholegrain foods contain more than 'white' counterparts?

As the table below demonstrates, there are significant variances between the fibre content of refined products and wholegrain products. The easiest way to increase your fibre intake is to make simple swaps!

Fibre content per 100g:

Cereals, Breads, Rice, Pasta		Fruits	
White bread	2.7g	Raspberries	4.5g
Wholemeal bread	6.5g	Pears	3.6g
White pasta	2.2g	Bananas	1.5g
Whole-wheat pasta	6.6g	Apples	2.4g
Basmati rice	1.3g	Strawberries	1.5g
Brown rice	4.7g	Vegetables	
Weetabix	10g	Green peas	5.5g
Porridge	10g	Cauliflower	1.9g
		Broccoli	3.3g
		Sweet potatoes	2.8g
		Mushrooms	1.7g
		Peas	4.5g
		Chickpeas	4.3g
		Nuts and Seeds	
		Peanuts	6.4g
		Sunflower seeds	6.0g
		Linseeds	29g

To increase your fibre intake in the healthiest possible fashion, be sure to:

- Eat your potatoes with the skin-on
- Read labels- choose cereals with a fibre content greater than 3g fibre per 100g
- Avoid peeling your fruit where possible
- Eat whole fruit rather than fruit pieces or juices
- Add a portion of seeds or nuts to porridge or whole-wheat cereals
- Drink plenty of fluids. Fibre works by absorbing water in your bowel, making your stools soft and easy for you to pass. Check out our blog on 'Better Beverages'

Remember for optimal gut health, don't go from 'zero to 100' overnight and gradually increase your fibre intake. It is important too to establish a regular meal pattern, avoid skipping meals and get enough exercise.

The 22nd of April celebrates Earth Day 2019, so why not do your part for the planet by choosing a sustainable plant based diet rich in fibre?

If you are experiencing gut symptoms or have an existing bowel condition, it is recommended you keep a food and symptom diary and discuss with your GP or a registered dietitian. For further advice visit www.indi.ie or www.bda.uk

**Love Your Gut Research Findings, 2018*

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