



Gut check: How's your digestive health?



There's a reason the old saying tells us to "go with our gut." Our gut — also called our digestive system — is a powerhouse in our body. It gets rid of toxins, breaks down the food we eat, and puts the nutrients from that food to work. A healthy gut is also core to our overall well-being — it affects everything from our mental health to our immune system.

Long-term risks

If we don't take care of our digestive system, it can also put us at risk for more serious issues. Poor long-term gut health is tied to:

- Inflammatory bowel disease (IBD)
- Irritable bowel syndrome (IBS)
- Diabetes
- Obesity

Signs of trouble

Our body has several ways of letting us know something in our gut might be off, including:

- Persistent bloating, diarrhea, or stomach pain.
- Unexplained weight loss or gain.
- Blood in the stool and changes to how often you need to go.
- Heartburn and indigestion.
- Skin irritations, such as acne or eczema.
- Frequent mood changes, including anxiety or irritability.

Talk to your doctor if you're experiencing any of these symptoms. They can suggest tests or treatment to get to the root of the issue.

Feed your gut well

The billions of bacteria in your gut are like the engine that keeps it running. Eating the right foods helps keep the good and bad bacteria in our gut well-balanced so it works correctly. Here are a few tips:

- **Eat a diverse diet full of fruits and vegetables.** A produce-rich diet helps make the good bacteria in your gut stronger, which keep things running smoothly.
- **Focus on fiber.** Fiber keeps you regular. It also helps lower cholesterol and blood pressure.
- **Make room for prebiotics and probiotics.** Probiotics and prebiotics work together to feed your gut bacteria and keep it healthy. You can take them as supplements or look for them in many natural sources.
- **Limit artificial sweeteners, red meat, and processed foods.** These all feed the bad bacteria in your gut, which can make you feel sick. They're also linked to other problems, such as heart disease and diabetes.

Other healthy gut habits

Because our gut is so connected to the rest of our body, there's more to keeping it healthy than just eating right.

- Exercise regularly.
- Don't smoke.
- Keep your stress in check.
- Get enough sleep.

It's also important to stay up on [regular preventive screenings](#), such as colonoscopies.



Talk to your doctor about gut health

A doctor can help you make gut-healthy changes. To find a doctor in your plan's network, scan the QR code below with your phone's camera.



Sources:

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