Gut Food

11 Superfoods (and 7 Recipes!) Your Belly Will Love

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FOOD REVOLUTION NETWORK

Why Healing Your Gut (and Keeping Your Gut Happy) Is Essential for Good Health and Happiness

Why is gut health so important? And what are the best foods for gut health? Get answers to heal your gut, stay regular, and achieve good health..

When someone suggests you should "go with your gut," they're more right than you probably realize.

Thanks to a whopping 40 trillion bacteria perpetually hard at work, **your gut helps power your entire body.**

Do you like pop music? If so, you've probably enjoyed hit songs by some of the following artists: Britney Spears, Katy Perry, NSYNC, Taylor Swift, Usher, Avril Lavigne, Justin Timberlake, and The Backstreet Boys. You may already be tapping your feet at some of their work, such as: "Baby, One More Time," "Roar," "It's Gonna Be Me," "Shake It Off," "Can't Stop the Feeling," "I Kissed a Girl," and "I Want It That Way."

Unless you're a music insider, you may not know that those songs, plus hundreds more performed by the most famous and commercially successful artists of the last couple of decades, were written by a retired Swedish singer-turned-songwriter and music producer, Max Martin. Preferring behind-the-scenes collaboration to frontman credit, Martin has turned the writing of pop hits into a science — and has the Billboard awards to prove it.

Do you know what else is a crucial behind-the-scenes partner to fantastic achievement? Your gut microbiome.

Virtually unstudied until recently, **the gut microbiome is now seen as the key to many aspects of health — digestion, immune function, and even cognition and mood.** And while Max Martin may prefer to stay under the public radar while he plies his craft, the human microbiome is now under the microscope, as it were, of public scrutiny.

With new popular awareness of the importance of the trillions of little critters that make their homes on and in our bodies, social media, blogs, and mainstream news outlets now bombard us with tips on keeping them strong and healthy. And like much medical and wellness info these days, there's at least as much misinformation as valid and useful guidance.

The State of Our Gut Health

The gut health of modern humans in developed countries has been severely compromised. We didn't know how bad it was until we started comparing our gut populations to those of Indigenous peoples who were maintaining, more or less, their traditional lifestyles. It turns out that Americans' microbiomes are about half as diverse as those of the Yanomami, an Amazonian tribe with limited interaction with the modern world.

Partly to blame is our modern obsession with cleanliness and fear of germs. Our approach to microorganisms has been total eradication, with many household products and sanitizers promising to wipe out 99.99% of all bacteria, viruses, and so on. The problem with this is that nature abhors a vacuum. And sterile environments are basically unclaimed territory ripe for exploitation by whatever new bug comes along.

Another source of harm to our microbiomes is the chlorine in municipal water, which, while doing important work in removing potentially deadly microorganisms from our drinking supply, also appears to reduce the diversity of species in our microbiomes. After all, if it kills bacteria in water, what do you think it does when it enters a human gut?

Antibiotic Resistance

We're not only becoming less capable of dealing with harmful pathogens but also empowering and training the worst ones, making them even more virulent and dangerous. By overprescribing antibiotics, our medical system artificially selects for the mutations that don't respond to antibiotics — the so-called antibiotic-resistant strains. After decades of miracles from antibiotics, we've reached the point where stronger and stronger drugs provide fewer and fewer benefits against these superbugs.

Even if all medical professionals got the message, we'd still have an antibiotic overuse (I'd say abuse) problem. Factory farms are by far the largest consumers and deployers of antibiotics, both to keep animals alive in incredibly cruel, unhygienic, and crowded conditions and to increase their growth rates and weights to increase profits.

These are industrial inputs, not prescribed drugs, and they attack all bacteria, including ones crucial for the animal's health. And if we eat those animals or drink their milk, we're at risk of exposure to the very antibiotic-resistant bacteria that the antibiotics have fueled.

We may not be able to personally end factory farming, reform the medical system, or invent a water purification method that removes the chlorine before it enters our homes.

But there's one area that's degrading our microbiomes where each of us does have control: the food we put in our mouths.

Why Gut Health Is Important for Your Body and Your Mind

The gut is composed of a host of microbes that affect your physiology and keep your body and brain functioning.

As many studies tell us, gut microbes affect how you store fat, balance glucose levels in your blood, and respond to hormones that make you feel hungry or satiated.

The wrong internal mix can set the stage for obesity and other health issues later in life.

Scientists have also found that gut bacteria produce neurotransmitters, including serotonin, dopamine, and GABA, that regulate your mood.

Researchers have also discovered that a nervous system in your gut (known as the "second brain") communicates with the brain in your head. It even plays a role in certain diseases and mental health.

In other words, **your body's and brain's wellness depends on your gut health**.

Gut and Immunity

One particularly timely aspect of the gut microbiome is how it interacts with and supports our immune system. There are two basic ways the immune system can go wrong: it can underreact to infection (or become overwhelmed by it), and it can overreact or get triggered by false alarms (attacking benign foreign cells and even the body itself).

The second problem, overreacting, appears to be responsible for the steady increase in gut health disorders and autoimmune diseases in the developed world that we've been seeing for many years now. Especially since the emergence of COVID-19, scientists have been studying our immune systems with renewed vigor, including how our microbiome impacts acute infections and chronic conditions.

The link is partly numerical: about 70-80% of the human immune system resides in the gut. This makes sense when you realize the gut is where the outside world meets our squishy, delicate insides. The world is teeming with microbes, and many of them hitch rides on our food and splash around in our intestines. If there was ever a place for a robust and alert immune system, this is it.

And robust it is; **the population of live microorganisms in the gut is estimated at around 100 trillion, which is 50 times greater than the number of galaxies in the known universe.**

These critters aren't freeloaders, either; in exchange for room and board, they keep us alive and well in many ways. They regulate metabolism, digest food our native digestive systems can't handle, and support the mucosal immune system to protect the body from infection.

But modern life has been hard on our microbiome for reasons we'll explore in a bit. For now, suffice it to say that we tend to have fewer beneficial microbes and more problematic ones than would be best for our health. This means it's harder to keep our guts healthy and harder to maintain a well-functioning immune system.

Good ‘Gut Bugs’ and How to Get Them

Positive bacteria are often called healthy gut bugs.

Good gut bugs help your **body digest and absorb nutrients, synthesize certain vitamins, and rally against intruders** like the flu and toxic-forming carcinogens.

In the wise words of David Perlmutter, MD: **“A healthy microbiome translates into a healthy human.”**

So, how can you keep your digestive system feeling good and functioning optimally? What are the best foods for gut health? Think **fiber, fermentation, and nutrient-dense foods.**

How The Foods You Eat Help (Or Hurt) Your Gut

When it comes to maintaining your microbiome at its healthiest level, nothing is more important than what you eat and drink.

The internal environment of your gut is dictated by what you put in your mouth — so **the foods you choose to eat are a crucial component of maintaining gut health.**

The good news is *even a lifetime of bad eating is fixable* — at least as far as your microbes are concerned. Amazingly, your body can create a new microbiota in as little as 24 hours — just by changing what you eat.

What you eat determines which bacteria thrive in your gut. And research tells us that **good gut bugs get stronger when fed colorful, fiber-rich, plant-based foods**.

A 2014 study published in the journal *The Proceedings of the Nutrition Society* found that **vegetables, grains, and beans fed a positive gut environment**. But meat, junk food, dairy, and eggs fed a negative gut environment.

Probiotics and Prebiotics: Two Gut-Healthy Compounds

These two terms — probiotics and prebiotics — are becoming more widely known, so you've probably heard them.

Probiotics are beneficial "gut bugs." And prebiotics are food for these good bacteria.

You can get both probiotics and prebiotics by eating the right foods.

Probiotics are in fermented foods, as well as in some supplements. And prebiotics are in certain fruits, vegetables, and whole grains. The most central prebiotic of all is fiber.

What About Probiotic Supplements?

Probiotics can help treat irritable bowel syndrome, diarrhea, colitis, acne, and eczema. And the strongest evidence for probiotics is related to their use in improving gut health and boosting immune function.

But **probiotic supplements don't always work.** In fact, a lot of people are taking probiotic supplements that are essentially a waste of money.

Here's the issue: the vast majority of probiotic bacteria are active and effective in the lower portions of the gastrointestinal (GI) tract. To get there, though, these bacteria must survive your highly acidic stomach environment.

So, how can you keep these probiotics intact? In other words, when should you take them?

They Prefer Not to Dine Alone

In a 2011 study published in Beneficial Microbes, researchers examined whether probiotic supplements were better when swallowed on an empty stomach or with a meal.

The researchers found that probiotic bacteria had the highest rates of survival when taken within 30 minutes before or simultaneously with a meal or drink that contained some fat.

Basically, the food provides a buffer for the bacteria, ensuring that it passes safely through your stomach.

Which Probiotic Supplements Are Best?

There are thousands of probiotic products on the market, with each company claiming theirs is the best. Scan the supplement aisle at your local grocer, and you're likely to be overwhelmed with options.

If you decide to take a probiotic supplement, here are four factors to look at when you shop:

1. **Price.** Probiotics vary widely in price, and why spend more than you need to?

2. **CFUs (Colony-Forming Units).** This is the total count of all of the bacteria in the probiotic. There's a wide range here, with brands offering anywhere from 1 billion to 100 billion CFUs per dose. The bigger the number, the more beneficial bacteria you get.

3. **Strains.** The total number of different types of bacteria in each probiotic varies greatly, and diversity is good. Every expert has a favorite combination, but the reality is that science knows very little about how the various strains interact with the human body. A broad spectrum of different kinds is likely to give you the best chances for success.

4. **Expiration Date.** Some probiotic supplements get so old that they are literally dead by the time they reach the consumer. Check expiration dates.

But there's a downside to probiotic supplements. Your gut needs massive microbial diversity. When you flood it with billions of CFUs of any one species, it could crowd out other species, leading to a net drop in the microbial diversity that is so important. And considering that each microbe has its own unique effects and functions, you could wind up giving your body more of something it already has too much of. So, should you take probiotic supplements? It really does depend.

But what's almost always beneficial is creating a nutrient-rich environment where diverse and helpful bacteria can thrive.

Fiber: Why It's Critical for Gut Health

While people tend to get up in arms about protein consumption, there's another nutrient that's more worrisome as far as deficiency risk: fiber.

Approximately 97% of Americans get at least the recommended amount of protein. But only about 3% of Americans get the recommended 40 grams of fiber they need per day — **and fiber is the most crucial ingredient for gut health**.

Fiber feeds the good bacteria we've been discussing, so it's vital to eat fiber-rich foods as often as possible.

Our microbes extract the fiber's energy, nutrients, and vitamins, including short-chain fatty acids, which can **improve immune function, decrease inflammation, and protect against obesity.**

Cleanse Your System

There are two main types of fiber: soluble and insoluble.

Soluble fiber helps lower blood glucose levels and LDL cholesterol. You can find it in oatmeal, legumes, and some fruits and veggies.

Insoluble fiber, on the other hand, offers more of a cleansing effect on your digestive environment. You'll find it in whole grains, kidney beans, and in fruits and veggies, too.

Fiber Helps Prevent One of The Most Common Gut Disorders

Fiber also plays a role in one of the most common digestive illnesses worldwide: diverticulitis (aka inflammation of the intestine).

According to a study published in *The Journal of Nutrition*, **eating insoluble fiber-rich foods has been found to reduce the risk of diverticulitis by an impressive 40%**.

All the Kraut: Getting Your Fill of Fermented Foods

Fiber isn't the only favorite fuel for the little fellas (sorry if I took this "f" thing too far!) that starts with the letter F. **Fermented foods can also be a key component of a diet that nurtures gut health.**

These foods give your gut healthy, living microorganisms to crowd out unhealthy bacteria, improve absorption of minerals, and support overall health.

Fermentation is a process that's been around for centuries. Our intrepid ancestors fermented foods to preserve them.

Here's how it works in a nutshell: Bacteria or yeast is added to a particular food, and they feed on the natural sugars. These microorganisms create lactic acid or alcohol, which helps preserve the food. They also **create probiotics** (as discussed above) and other beneficial compounds.

Amazingly, the fermentation process also **adds additional nutrients to foods**. And unlike probiotic pills, many "wild fermented foods," like sauerkraut, kimchi, and pickles, are host to a wide diversity of beneficial microbes.

Gut-Healthy Fermented Foods You Might Love

Think about eating or making these fermented foods to keep your gut happy and healthy. Other than tempeh, these are best kept raw, so you don't kill the beneficial probiotics.

Sauerkraut: Fermented Cabbage with A Distinctive Flavor

Sauerkraut is a staple in German cuisine. You can find it in most grocery and health food stores, but it's even better to stick with homemade (or "freshly fermented") varieties to achieve the full nutrient value.

Fermented cabbage is high in B vitamins and helps you absorb iron, too.

You can pile it on a carrot dog, add it to a German-inspired "Buddha bowl," or use it to season just about any grain, legume, scramble, or vegetable dish.

Tempeh: A Traditional Soy Product that's Been Eaten for Hundreds of Years

This fermented soy food is becoming easier to find these days, with more and more eateries offering it on their menus and more stores stocking it on shelves.

A 2014 study published in the *Polish Journal of Microbiology* showed that this popular protein-rich food can **increase the number of healthy bacteria,** including Lactobacillus.

Try eating tempeh on sandwiches, in salads, or as a plant-based "bacon" alternative. Unlike most fermented foods, however, tempeh should be cooked before you eat it. And most people find that it needs a lot of seasonings to taste good because plain tempeh can be a bit bitter and very bland.

Kimchi: A Spicy Alternative to Sauerkraut

A Korean alternative to sauerkraut, kimchi is also fermented cabbage made with several different spices and ingredients. Common ingredients include salt, chili powder, onion, garlic, and ginger. It's sometimes traditionally made with a fish stock base, but it's easy to find a plant-based version in stores or to make your own at home.

A 2014 study published in the *Journal of Medicinal Food* confirmed that kimchi is **high in probiotics** and is an excellent fuel for gut health. Other studies have shown that kimchi can help fight cancer, obesity, aging, and constipation while also contributing to your immune system, skin health, and brain health.

Eat kimchi in bowls, wraps, or as a seasoning on just about anything.

Miso: A Traditional Japanese Bean Paste

If nothing else, you've probably had some experience with miso soup, but this soybean paste has a whole host of uses in the kitchen.

Plus, it's brimming with good bacteria and may even help **prevent cancer and lower blood pressure**.

Miso paste can be used to make soup, added to salad dressings, or turned into a healthy mustard or plant-based "miso-mayo."

Kefir: One of the Most Probiotic-Rich Foods on the Planet

While this cultured product is sometimes made with dairy, its coconut or water-based counterparts can be even better — and keep you free from the controversial health effects of cow's milk.

You may be able to find dairy-free kefir in your area. Or you can order kefir starters and make it yourself using coconut water or nut milk. Just be sure that you don't oversweeten it because sugar can be bad for your microbiome.

Pickles: Uniquely Sour Vegetables

Who doesn't love a briny pickle snack? Pickles (be they cucumber or made from other veggies) can be **high in antioxidants, good gut bugs, and probiotics.**

But not all pickled foods are fermented. It's best to stick with fresh varieties (sold in a fridge in stores — not the ones that are in shelf-stable bottles) to make sure they are raw and alive and that the nutrients stay intact. Or try making your own pickles.

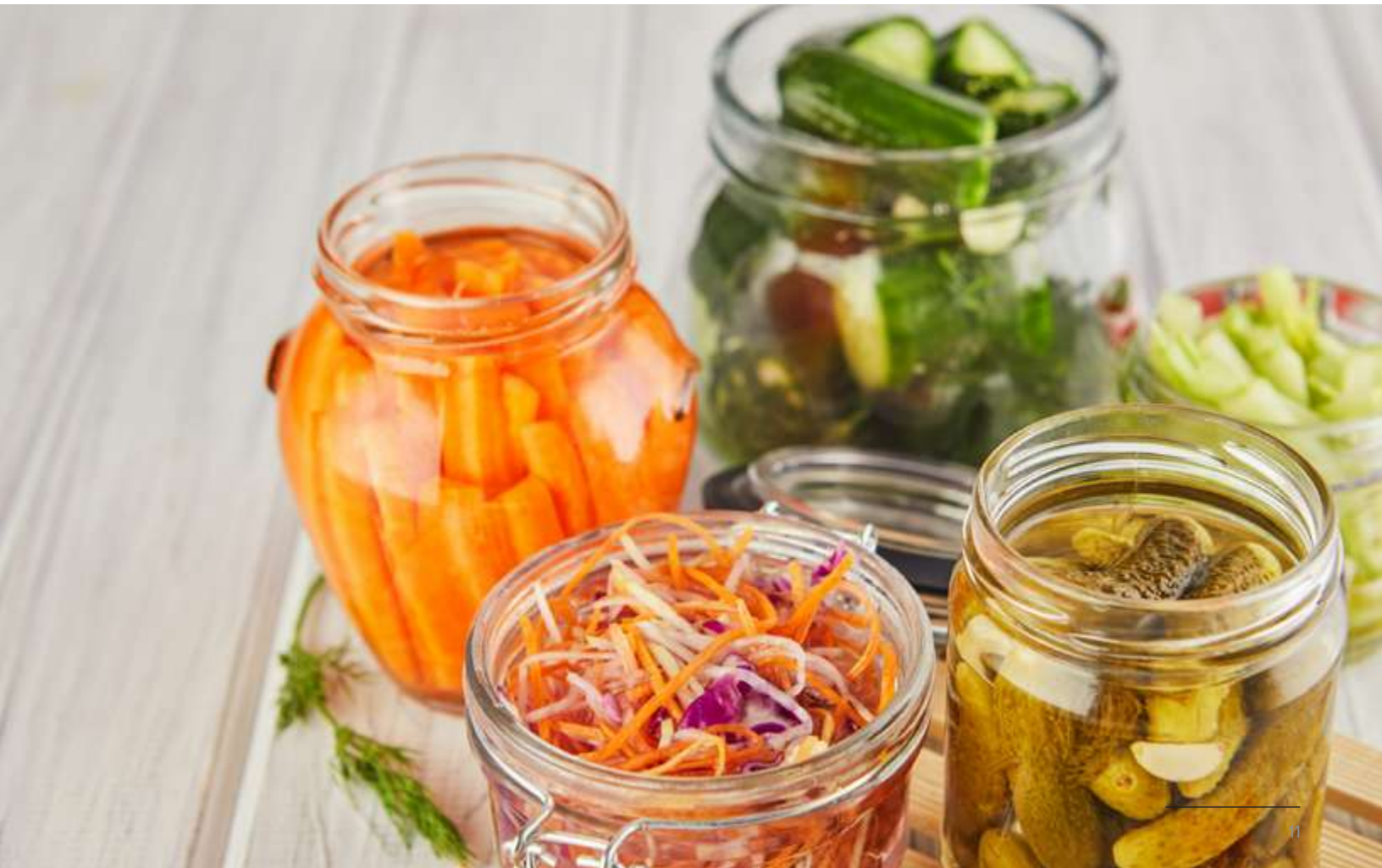
An Important Note About Eating Pickled Vegetables

Making pickled veggies, like sauerkraut and kimchi, part of your diet can be a healthy step. But pickled veggies should only be *part* of your vegetable consumption.

They are usually very salty. And people who make pickled vegetables a primary source of vegetables in their diet tend to get more sodium than is optimal, which can contribute to higher rates of certain forms of cancer.

So to be sure not to increase your risk of cancer, aim to make fresh, non-fermented vegetables a more significant part of your diet than pickled vegetables.

Think about eating small portions of fermented foods daily and using them as a source of salt, replacing table salt, soy sauce, or other salt sources with pickled vegetables.



Best Foods for Gut Health: 11 Foods to Consider Eating Often

Besides fermented foods, what exactly should you be eating for better gut health?

Some of the best options for foods good for your gut include these 11 all-star edibles:

Go Green for Your Gut

Dandelion Greens: An Edible Weed that is Great for Your Gut

This super healthy green is GREAT for your gut. Dandelion greens are loaded with minerals, improve blood lipids, and are rich in inulin, a particular prebiotic fiber that **boosts your gut's production of healthy, good-for-you bacteria**, like bifidobacteria.

David Perlmutter, MD, comments: "Boosting bifidobacteria has a number of benefits, including helping to reduce the population of potentially damaging bacteria, enhancing bowel movements, and actually helping boost immune function."

They can be bitter. But Dr. Perlmutter recommends sauteeing them with onions or drinking them as tea. You can also use them in soups and salads.

Broccoli: More Reason to Eat This Popular Veggie: It's Good for Your Gut!

Not everyone is a fan of this green cruciferous veggie, but its health benefits are undeniable.

In a 2017 study published in the Journal of Functional Foods, when mice ate broccoli with their regular diet. (Our view on the use of animals in medical research is here.)

The effects may also apply to other veggies in the cruciferous family, which are a great source of dietary fiber and gut-healthy phytonutrients like glucosinolates, which gastrointestinal microbes appear to love. So load up on cauliflower, Brussels sprouts, and cabbage. Add them to stir-fries, roast them, steam them, or grate and pile them on top of your favorite salad.

Asparagus: A Crisp Spring Veggie that Aids Digestion

Rich in prebiotics, these green stalks are as good for you as they are delicious.

Like dandelion greens, asparagus is also rich in inulin. It can help **promote regularity and decrease bloating**.

Eat your asparagus steamed, sauteed, roasted, or chopped raw in salads. Or enjoy lightly steamed and chopped asparagus over quinoa or rice or added to a range of dishes.

Seaweed: A Sea Algae that's Good for You and Your Gut

Seaweed is hardly a weed. It would probably more aptly be named "sea gem" on account of its nutrient- and fiber-rich benefits.

A study of Japanese women showed that high seaweed intake **increases good gut bacteria**. Another study researched alginate, a substance in brown seaweed, and found that it can **strengthen gut mucus, slow down digestion**, and make food release its energy more slowly.

If you're wondering how to eat it, here are a few ideas. Try some nori (dried seaweed made into sheets) wraps, make seaweed salad, add wakame to soup, or add kombu (edible kelp) to your stir fry or pot of beans (it will help reduce gas).

Roughage Does a Gut Good

Jerusalem Artichoke: Also Known As Sunroot, Sunchoke, or Earth Apple

This unique tuber may be widely overlooked, but it's **one of the best foods for gut health**, as it's rich in inulin.

Don't let the name fool you, though — it's nothing like the leafy green "artichoke." This root vegetable is starchy, savory, and has a slightly sweet and nutty taste.

A 2010 study published in the British Journal of Nutrition showed that the prebiotic effect of Jerusalem artichoke can increase the fecal Bifidobacterium level and cause an increase in the level of the Lactobacillus/Enterococcus group (all good stuff).

One thing to note: Jerusalem artichokes can — ahem — increase digestive activity, so go slow if you're just starting to eat them. And for newbies, you can cook them like a potato. Or, to get the most gut-boosting benefits, shred Jerusalem artichoke raw and add it to salads.

Jicama (Also Known as Mexican Turnip)

This fresh, sweet, and crunchy root vegetable is another **great source of inulin fiber**. One cup of raw jicama chopped up and added to a salad will bring a whopping 6g of fiber to the table — 15% of your daily recommended intake.

And jicama is also **great for weight loss and blood sugar control.** Plus, it's high in vitamin C.

This uniquely textured veggie is perfect for salads, smoothies, and stir-fries. It also makes a great snack and can be sliced thin and drizzled with lemon juice and your favorite spices.

Flaxseed: A Tiny but Tremendous Seed for Your Gut

Thanks to its wealth of phytonutrient precursors, this powerhouse seed creates the highest content of lignans (antioxidants with potent anticancer properties) of all foods used for human consumption. Flaxseed fuels your good gut flora.

These seeds contain soluble fiber and can help improve digestive regularity. Plus, they're a rich source of omega-3 fatty acids, which bring down inflammation in your body.

Eat ground flaxseed sprinkled on smoothie bowls or salads. But be sure to choose freshly ground flaxseed or grind it fresh yourself because whole flaxseeds pass through your body without being digested.

Get Fruity for Your Gut

Bananas: One of the Most Popular Foods in the World

This popular and versatile fruit is brilliant at **restoring harmony in your gut's ecosystem**.

Bananas are also rich sources of potassium and magnesium, which can aid against inflammation. A 2011 study published in the journal Anaerobe even showed that bananas can **reduce bloating** and help support the release of excess weight.

So slice some on your cereal, blend them in a smoothie, or keep them on hand for midday snack attacks.

Apples: An Apple a Day Keeps the (Gut) Doc Away

Maybe the easiest fruit to find, apples are an excellent dietary addition.

They are high in fiber. A 2014 study published in *Food Chemistry* found **green apples boost good gut bacteria**.

Eat apples raw as a snack. Or you can even enjoy them stewed. Stewed apples have been found to be good for your microbiome, and they may also help to heal your gut.

Two More Foods Your Gut Will Love

Garlic: A Pungent, Spicy Vegetable Closely Related to Onions

The ultimate in food flavorings, this tasty additive is also great for your gut health.

A 2013 in-vitro study published in *Food Science and Human Wellness* found that garlic **boosted the creation of good gut microbes**. The research showed that garlic might also help prevent some gastrointestinal diseases.

So go wild! Throw garlic into many of your favorite foods. And try to include some raw garlic, too, because it has the most prebiotic benefits.

Gum Arabic: Sap from the Acacia Tree

You may not have heard of this gut-healthy superstar, but it's prebiotic and has a substantial amount of fiber.

A 2008 study published in the *British Journal of Nutrition* showed that gum Arabic **increases good bacterial strains**, particularly Bifidobacteria and Lactobacilli.

Also known as acacia fiber, you can stir the powder in water and drink it — or take it as a supplement.

Healthy Gut, Happy Human

In most cases, supplements aren't needed to support a healthy gut. They can help, but what you eat is by far the most important factor.

New York Times columnist Jane Brody sums up good gut-health advice, saying: "People interested in fostering a health-promoting array of gut microorganisms should consider **shifting from a diet heavily based on meats, carbohydrates and processed foods to one that emphasizes *plants*."**

If you aim to follow the recommendations in this article, you'll be supporting better bathroom habits, a healthier immune response — and even a better, brighter mood. Take care of your gut, and it will give you the TLC you need.

Gut-Health Promoting Recipes to Nourish Your Microbiome

Seven Gut Health Recipes to Replenish Your Microbiome

The recipes below all contain ingredients that can help restore the gut — whole plant-based foods that are packed with phytonutrients, fiber, prebiotics, and probiotics.

The Fluffy Buckwheat Chia Pancakes are a fun and tasty way to incorporate buckwheat (a high-fiber food that cooks like a grain, though it's botanically considered a pseudo-grain) into your morning routine. You'll enjoy a fiber-filled, satisfying salad with the Grilled Peach and Barley (a member of the Resistant Starch Brigade) Salad. And get a double dose of prebiotic goodness with the Balsamic Dijon Artichokes and Asparagus.

Add some live bacteria to your plate by enjoying the Kimchi "Fried" Rice and Veggies. You'll also find fiber, prebiotics, resistant starch, and phytonutrients in the Blackened Tempeh and Sweet Potato Bowl with Avocado and Kale. Turn creamy cashews into tangy yogurt with at-home fermentation, and you won't even have to think about food labels.

Finally, gift your gut some anthocyanins, polyphenol pigments that act as prebiotics, in the Blueberry Ginger Smoothie. The ginger in the smoothie also supports gut health by reducing inflammation, relieving nausea, and fighting pathogens. Cheers to a healthy gut and a happy you!

1. Fluffy Buckwheat Chia Pancakes

Studies show that those who eat a variety of whole grains have more diverse bacteria in their guts, which may lead to better health. Swap out traditional pancakes with these nutty and fluffy buckwheat chia pancakes, and enjoy fiber-fueled nutrition with each bite. Word has it that your gut will thank you!

2. Grilled Peach and Barley Salad

Barley is a good-for-you whole grain food that contains resistant starch — a fiber-like nutrient that resists digestion and ferments in the large intestine — contributing to a healthy gut. The accompanying Lemon Shallot Vinaigrette is also good for your gut, thanks to its prebiotic fiber. Finally, leafy greens provide plenty of phytonutrients that can reduce gut inflammation and fiber that can contribute to digestive and gut health. It's a healthy gut trifecta!

3. Balsamic Dijon Artichokes and Asparagus

Both artichokes and asparagus have a type of prebiotic fiber called inulin, which feeds the healthy bacteria in your gut, keeping them happy and thriving. And happy and thriving healthy gut bacteria help to keep you happy and thriving, too! This side dish is delicious alongside grilled tofu or tempeh or as a part of a grain bowl.

4. Kimchi "Fried" Rice and Veggies

This dish delivers fiber from the rice (and veggies), colorful phytonutrients from the

vegetables, and probiotics from the kimchi. It also tastes super delicious and looks really pretty on the table! Pro-tip: Add the kimchi at the end of cooking to avoid destroying its bountiful beneficial bacteria.

5. Blackened Tempeh and Sweet Potato Bowl with Avocado and Kale

Tempeh is a fermented food, but since it needs to be cooked before being consumed, we can't benefit from its probiotics. Tempeh does, however, contain many other nutrients, including prebiotic fiber, which can feed the already existing healthy bacteria in our guts. What's more, sweet potato contains resistant starch while avocado and kale bring the phytonutrients — all key ingredients for a healthy gut. Your good gut bacteria are probably getting hungry as you read this description!

6. Easy Homemade Cashew Yogurt

Are you into making magic? Because that's what it feels like when you create your own yogurt! Technically, yogurt isn't cooked. It's incubated, which means it's held at a constant warm temperature to encourage gut-friendly bacteria to be fruitful and multiply. This equates to a yummy, tangy yogurt and a happy belly!

7. Blueberry Ginger Smoothie

Fun fact: Healthy bacteria in the gut enjoy more than just fiber. They also enjoy certain phytonutrients like anthocyanins from blueberries, which act as food to help good bacteria thrive. Ginger has been touted for its ability to help heal the gut for centuries. It can reduce inflammation, alleviate nausea, and fight intestinal infections. Plus, it adds a little zing to this nourishing smoothie!

Go Forth & Heal Your Gut

Modern society has an immunity problem, which stems partly from a multipronged onslaught against our gut microbiome. Many of us live in a world that doesn't expose us to enough pathogens to "exercise" our immune systems. We kill beneficial bacteria with soaps and sanitizers; we dump repeated doses of antibiotics into our bodies; and we eat diets that starve the good bacteria and feed harmful bacteria.

But there are things you can do to protect and even heal your gut, which can strengthen your immune system. One of the best ways to improve gut health is by improving your diet. Focus on whole foods, especially fruits, veggies, whole grains, legumes, nuts, seeds, and fermented foods. Eliminate processed foods, sugar, and factory-farmed meat (especially processed meat).

That way, you'll be able to say about your gut bacteria what Max Martin wrote for Katy Perry in the song "Part of Me": "This is the part of me / That you're never gonna ever take away from me."