

Listen to your Gut

by Melissa Cohen Nutritional Therapist BSc (Hons), mBANT, mIFM, NLP Practitioner
Nutritional Therapist BSc (Hons), Mbant, mIFM, NLP Practitioner



Listening to your gut is said to be the first sign that something feels slightly off. When it's right, there is no need to question it.

That niggling feeling, whether we are sitting with friends, in a meeting or just by ourselves. It may be

hard to switch that feeling off and it must not be ignored. It is that persistent pull or nag that we need to act or change something. I am a great believer in science and also intuition.

This article focuses on the science behind how our gut communicates with all areas of ourselves, including the brain, immunity, metabolism, hormones and even our diet.

The gut can be referred to as the digestive tract. It starts from the mouth and continues right through to the anus. The whole surface area has been compared to a tennis court, though more accurately around 8 metres long. It takes around 8 hours for food and liquid to pass to your small intestines, which is where your nutrients are absorbed. Eventually reaching the colon some 36 hours later.

Diet alone is not enough, as you are only as healthy as what your gut absorbs. Our gut is taller than us! Mother nature is clever, and for that reason needs to be treated with care and a variety of nutrients.

The digestive process starts in the mouth, through chewing food. This stimulates the enzyme, amylase, to start breaking down foods. The first step to good digestion is taking time out to eat, away from your desk. There is good reason for the saying "Rest and Digest".

When eating meals or snacks containing protein and fats the pancreas is stimulated to produce digestive enzymes. This helps break down these nutrients into smaller components that pass easily through the intestinal walls ready to be transported to our cells.

If digestive function is not optimal, this can create a block of undigested foods triggering bloating, flatula-

ence, constipation, and low nutrient absorption.

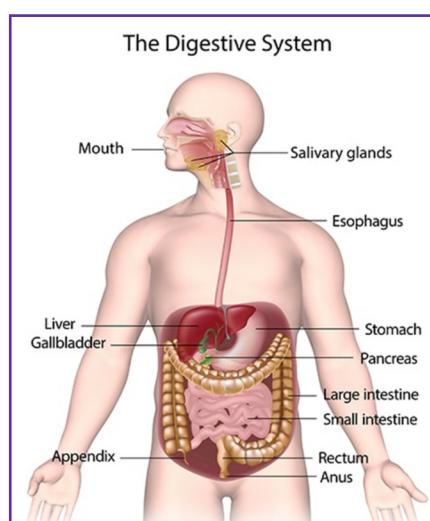
Frustratingly, this is more prevalent as we get older and is exacerbated through the use of proton pump inhibitors (PPIs) such as Omeprazole and Esomeprazole.

Natural sources to stimulate digestion are: apple cider vinegar, bitter foods i.e. spring onions, watercress, ginger, rocket, lemon and waiting 3-4 hours between each meal and no snacking.

The gut is known as our second brain, that's because 95% of serotonin, our feel good neurotransmitter, is produced in our intestines. Managing our mental wellbeing starts in the gut. Serotonin is influenced by our microbiota, otherwise known as beneficial bacteria. Beneficial bacteria thrive on fibre.

Aiming for at least 30g of fibre per day looks like this:

- 2 tbsp. Chia seeds (8 grams)
- ½ avocado (4 grams)
- 1 sweet potato (3 grams)
- Large handful of raspberries (7 grams)
- ½ can of chickpeas (10 grams)



Serotonin not only makes us feel happy, it also helps regulate bowel movements.

Beneficial bacteria also known as probiotics can be consumed through fermenting foods. Some of these foods you are probably eating already - Kefir, organic yoghurt, kombucha, sauerkraut, kimchi, sourdough bread, miso, pickles and buttermilk.

Beneficial bacteria are essential to health and has been called "The Pharmacy in the gut" as they produce B vitamins and vitamin K, essential for energy, detoxification, and blood clotting.

On average there are 10 times more bacteria cells than human cells, which is huge! The human body has at least 10 trillion, so that's at least 100 trillion bacteria cells.

These friendly bacteria live in harmony in our gut and out-crowd any unwanted bacteria. This army of friendly bacteria acts as our first line of defence,

lining up in our intestines, ears, mouth, and lungs, ready to protect us.

If beneficial bacteria are out of balance, it can be linked to autoimmune disorders, depression, IBS, gum disease and dementia. In fact, a huge proportion of immune system resides in our gut and new research is finding antibodies being produced in the gut.

Studies now suggest that certain bacteria are negatively associated with Type 2 diabetes. The main bacteria are *Bifidobacterium*, which you can obtain through a supplement known as a "probiotic" or eating fermented foods.

There is also a terminology called the Thyroid-Gut Axis, which is a hypothesis of how microbiota influences thyroid function by lowering inflammation, similar to the Type 2 diabetes hypothesis.

A large proportion of autoimmune diseases could be an interaction of genetic predisposition and environmental factors, ie, nutrition and lifestyle. A study showed that low microbiota can inhibit iodothyronine deiodinase which is an enzyme that converts thyroxine (T4) to its more active form triiodothyronine (T3).

This army of bacteria, as discussed, can be populated with the use of probiotic supplementation.

There are so many to choose from. I suggest changing your probiotic every 2-3 months, to create diversity in your gut. Imagine villages of families of bacteria, which thrive on a variety of vegetables which are known as prebiotic foods. These foods are non-digestible and are broken down by feeding our bacteria. Prebiotic foods, include:

- Mushrooms
- Onions
- Garlic
- Oats
- Artichokes
- Asparagus
- Leeks
- Dandelion

Foods to AVOID that encourage overgrowth of yeast and squeeze out the beneficial bacteria Are:

- Alcohol
- Artificial sweeteners
- Refined sugar
- Fizzy drinks

Supplements to help support gut health are probiotics, digestive enzymes, bitters and complex

B vitamins

Always speak to a Nutritional Therapist for personalised supplementation to gain the best results.

Lastly the gut/brain axis is a bi-directional flow of communication, and it is important to remember that your gut is always listening.

Can you recall the last time you were stressed; it may have impacted your bowel movements or appetite? This is due to a large nerve called the "vagus nerve", which connects the brain to the gastrointestinal tract signalling through hormones and neurotransmitters.

Stimulate your vagus nerve through:

- Cold showers
- Splashing cold water on face and temples on rising
- Singing, humming
- Meditation
- Deep breathing

There are a lot of recommendations in this article, though I suggest that you pick one action per day, whether it's to reduce alcohol or add fermented food. Though the key to successful changes with nutrition is to be consistent with dietary changes for at least 30 days to get results.

If you would like to take advantage of our Digestive Package for Thyroid UK members, which includes testing and personalised nutrition suggestions, please send us an email. We look forward to working with you towards optimal gut health.

In the meantime, follow us on Instagram - [@melissacohen_nutrition](https://www.instagram.com/melissacohen_nutrition) or drop us an email at melissa@melissa-cohen.com www.melissa-cohen.com

