

Cultivating a healthy GI tract



Your belly can play a major role in staying healthy and happy

It's important to understand why the gut is such a marvel at defending and protecting your body. The evidence is growing that there may be a link between the health of the gut and resistance to many diseases (including several forms of cancer), how you process food, and how alert and energetic you are.^{1,2,3,4,5,6}

The vastness of your gut's defense team

There are about one hundred trillion microbes in your GI tract — about 95 percent of all the bacteria and microorganisms in your body. These tiny beneficial bacteria can act together as a physical barrier protecting your gut. They can also join together against pathogens (anything that causes a disease, like a virus or bad bacteria).

Scientists believe that gut microbes are responsible for many functions that are involved in immunity, the absorption of nutrients, and metabolizing energy.

The healthy diversity of gut flora

Gut flora is one of the terms used to describe the complex community of microorganisms that live in your GI tract.⁴ Another term is gut microbiota.⁴ It isn't just the volume of microbes that add up to a strong defense, it's the incredible diversity of that gut flora. Collectively, this ecosystem is called "the gut microbiome."

When the rich diversity of this ecosystem is diminished or disrupted, scientists believe that conditions like type 2 diabetes, obesity, and inflammatory bowel disease can be the result.



Take the *Gutsy Challenge* to cultivate a healthier GI tract

The *Gutsy Challenge* is designed to help you make healthier lifestyle changes in four areas over four weeks. Here are some examples of the things you can try in each category to help preserve and strengthen the vastness and diversity of your gut's ecosystem.

Week 1: Diet	Have active yoghurt as dessert
Week 2: Sleep	Limit electronic screen time an hour before bed
Week 3: Physical activity	Ask a friend to join you for a workout
Week 4: Stress	Practice gratitude by writing down three good things that happened today

It's important to set realistic goals for yourself as you adopt new healthy behaviours. For example, if you don't have a regular exercise routine, start with a moderate effort. Perhaps start with a brisk 15-minute walk three times a week, and try working up to 40 minutes. Or do two or three segments of 10 to 15 minutes per day. Remember, your cardiovascular health can also benefit from the same lifestyle changes.

Remember to consult with your doctor before starting an exercise program. If you need help and encouragement, ask your family and friends for their support.

1. Nature Outlook, "The gut microbiome," January 2020
2. Journal of the American College of Cardiology, "Intestinal microbiota in cardiovascular health and disease: JACC state-of-the-art review," April 2019
3. Journal of Food and Drug Analysis, "Revisit gut microbiota and its impact on human health and disease," July 2019
4. BMJ, "Role of the gut microbiota in nutrition and health," June 2018
5. Healthline, "Why the gut microbiome is crucial for your health," June 2017
6. Journal of Neuroscience, "Advances in enteric neurobiology: The "brain" in the gut in health and disease," October 2018

The information and materials included in MetLife's Health and Wellness Information Library, including all toolkits, modules, template communications, text, charts, graphics and other materials, (collectively, the "Content") are intended to provide general guidance on health and wellness matters and are not, and should not be relied on as, medical advice. While the Content is based on resources that MetLife believes to be well-documented, MetLife is not responsible for the accuracy of the Content, and you rely on the Content at your own risk. Each person's condition and health circumstances are unique, and therefore the Content may not apply to you. The Content is not a substitute for professional medical advice. You should always consult your licensed health care professional for the diagnosis and treatment of any medical condition and before starting or changing your health regimen, including seeking advice regarding what drugs, diet, exercise routines, physical activities or procedures are appropriate for your particular condition and circumstances.