

Signs that Your Microbiome Might Be Out of Balance

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It wasn't that long ago that those who claimed that their gut microbiome was out of balance were considered "fringe" or even crazy. Most doctors didn't believe that there was such a thing as a yeast overgrowth in the gut or that probiotics were anything but a waste of money. What a difference a few years make! In the last 10 years, research on the gut microbiome has exploded and opinions have changed. The gut microbiome is now considered one of the hottest topics of research in the world.

The gut microbiome is a diverse microbiome in your digestive system. It contains trillions of microorganisms, mostly bacteria, viruses and fungi that, for the most part, are good for you. When a microbiome gets out of balance, often from antibiotic use, stress, lack of sleep and/or poor diet, your risk of many diseases including cancer, diabetes, obesity and heart disease increases. But how do you know if you have an unbalanced gut microbiome? First of all, there are some tests out there, but from what I understand, they won't actually give you a complete picture of what is going on.

An easier way to discern if you could have an out of balance gut microbiome is by looking at your health history and any symptoms you might have. If you know you have taken a lot of antibiotics or have been under chronic stress, don't sleep well and have eaten poorly for a long time, there is a good chance your microbiome might be out of balance.

These are common symptoms:

- 1) Digestive difficulties:** It makes perfect sense that if the microbes in your digestive tract are out of balance that you are more likely to experience stomach ailments such as diarrhea, constipation, heartburn, gas or bloating. It is more difficult for your body to properly digest food when the digestive tract is not functioning optimally.
- 2) Food intolerances:** Certain foods may bother your digestion if you have a sub optimal gut microbiome. If you have a hard time digesting these foods then you may be suffering from a food intolerance and you may experience the stomach ailments mentioned above (diarrhea, constipation, heartburn, gas or bloating).
- 3) Skin conditions:** There is still the need for a lot of research when it comes to gut health and skin conditions such as acne and eczema, but research shows that people who experience these skin conditions often have a less diverse gut microbiome. Your goal is to build a very diverse gut microbiome.
- 4) Brain fog:** Over the last few years, the gut has been dubbed by scientists as “the second brain”. They haven’t proven that the gut actually is able to think like the brain, but scientists have shown that there is a very relevant connection between the two. The more your gut microbiome is out of balance, the more likely you will experience conditions such as brain fog. You will also likely be at an increased risk of other medical complications such as stroke.
- 5) Depression/anxiety:** It was once thought that irritable bowel syndrome and other stomach ailments were caused by depression and anxiety, but more and more research is showing it is the other way around. Studies are showing that an unbalanced gut microbiome can lead to depression and anxiety.

Of course, there could be other explanations for the symptoms above, but increasingly there seems to be a clearer connection between gut health and the health of your entire body.

Luckily, there are ways to improve your gut microbiome:

- changing your diet (i.e. reduce processed foods, eat more fermented food products such as yogurt, fermented sauerkraut, fermented pickles and fermented olives)
- taking a good probiotic (it should be refrigerated and recommended by someone at your local co-op/whole foods/health food market)
- getting enough sleep
- managing stress in positive ways
- exercising regularly

Treat your gut well and your gut, in turn, will treat you well.

