



Happy Gut, Happy Life!

A 7-day Self-Directed Smorgasbord Challenge

August 15 to 21, 2022

Probiotics or “good bacteria” are critical to overall health and longevity. Perhaps it is time to add “feeding our gut” as an important part of your overall health regime in the same way you consider exercise, adequate sleep and healthy eating. By simply eating a variety of foods containing probiotics, you can help:

- Boost your immune system
- Maintain better weight control
- Improve heart health
- Lower blood sugar and risk of diabetes
- Enhance brain health

Learn more about probiotics by reading the attached materials. To earn a prize you must eat 10 different kinds of prebiotics, at least 1 probiotic every day and 3 different kinds of probiotics during the week. No registration is necessary. Return your completed log and prize forms to Mary Harrington at mharrington@mma.org or mail to MIIA, 3 Center Plaza, Suite 610, Boston, MA 02108 by August 31, 2022 to be eligible for prizes (only MIIA/BCBS members are eligible for prizes).

All You Ever Wanted to Know about a Happy Gut!



In certain cultures, the gut is thought of as the “second brain” and considering the role gut health plays in our overall health there is good reason for this. The gut is the bodies digestive tract, which houses nearly 1,000 different species of bacteria and these bacteria are often referred to as the gut microbiota or microbiome. Most of the bacteria in the gut are our friends and support normal digestion. In recent years, much research has focused on the fact that these bacteria play a far larger role in our health over and above supporting digestion. We now know that the “probiotics” or “good bacteria” in our gut are critical to our overall health and longevity. Perhaps it is time to consider “feeding our gut” an important part of our overall health regime in the same way we consider exercise, adequate sleep and healthy eating. If we can make this part of our daily routine, we can help keep our gut happy and ourselves healthy.

Within those trillions of gut bacteria are about 1,000 different species, represented by some 5,000 distinct bacterial strains. Everyone’s gut microbiota is unique, but there are certain combinations and collections of bacteria that are found in most healthy individuals.

The main factors that affect your personal microbial mix are age, diet, environment, genes, and medications (particularly exposure to antibiotics, which can deplete gut bacteria). Your gut microbiota plays many roles. It metabolizes nutrients from food and certain medications, serves as a protective barrier against intestinal infections, and produces vitamin K, which helps make blood-clotting proteins.

But the gut microbiota may do much more. Initial research findings suggest gut bacteria may be the key to helping prevent or treat some diseases.

- **Boost your immune system (the system that helps fight off infection and disease):** By communicating with immune cells, the gut microbiome can control how your body responds to infection.
- **Maintain better weight control:** An imbalance of healthy and unhealthy microbes is sometimes called gut dysbiosis, and it may contribute to weight gain. When you don’t feed the bacteria with enough fiber-rich foods, they send out starvation signals, which can contribute to obesity.
- **Improve heart health:** Interestingly, the gut microbiome may even affect heart health. A recent study in 1,500 people found that the gut microbiome played an important role in promoting “good” HDL cholesterol and lowering triglycerides.
- **Lower blood sugar and the risk of diabetes:** The gut microbiome also may help control blood sugar, which could affect the risk of type 1 and 2 diabetes. Researchers are still trying to understand the connection between gut health and diabetes, but they do know that diabetes and obesity are both associated with less diversity in the gut microbiome.
- **Enhance brain health:** The gut microbiome may even benefit brain health in a number of ways. First, certain species of bacteria can help produce chemicals in the brain called neurotransmitters. For example, serotonin is an antidepressant neurotransmitter that’s mostly made in the gut. Second, the gut is physically connected to the brain through millions of nerves. Therefore, the gut microbiome may also affect brain health by helping control the messages that are sent to the brain through these nerves. A small number of studies have also shown that certain probiotics can improve symptoms of depression and other mental health disorders.

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Get your gut in check

As one researcher points out, "Anything that can feed good bacteria and keep them plentiful is good for overall health. When the gut is happy, you are happy." Here are some suggestions on how to do that:

Prebiotics

Prebiotics are high fiber foods that serve as fuel for the good bacteria living in our gut. The greater variety of fiber foods the better. The person who eats a greater diversity of plants in a week will have happier bacteria than the person who only eats one or two high fiber foods, even if they are getting the same amount of fiber gram for gram. Here are some of the most potent prebiotic foods:

- Almonds
- Asparagus
- Bananas
- Burdock root
- Cereal grains (whole wheat, barley, rye)
- Chicory root
- Endive
- Garlic
- Greens (especially dandelion greens)
- Jerusalem artichoke
- Jicama
- Kiwi
- Leeks
- Legumes (chickpeas, black beans, etc.)
- Mushrooms
- Oats
- Onions
- Raspberries or blackberries

Keep in mind that all of these foods are high fiber and if you are currently not eating a high fiber diet, start slowly. Also, be sure to drink adequate water throughout the day.



Probiotics

These are the foods that are cultured or fermented and have probiotic bacteria living in them when we eat them. Some of the probiotics arrive intact in our large intestines and help to form new colonies of friendly bacteria. Each of the foods listed below contains different strains of good bacteria, so again, aim for a variety to really feed your gut. The more diverse your gut bacteria the better! Keep in mind, however, that if you heat any of the foods listed below you will kill the probiotics living in the food. *Warning: If you are currently not eating any probiotic foods – start slowly! Do not drink an entire bottle of kombucha in a sitting (4oz is a serving size). Eating too much of these foods too quickly can cause gas and bloating and other discomfort. Your body will adjust as you add these foods to your daily routine.*

Yogurt

We have to give a nod to the most famous probiotic food: yogurt. Whether you love Greek or regular, low-fat or full-fat, look for the phrase "live active cultures" on the label. Try to find a yogurt that has 5 different strains of bacteria (they should be listed on the label). Choosing a plain yogurt has less added sugar than the flavored kinds, but if you won't eat plain then fruit flavored is ok. Just be sure to aim for fewer than 15 grams of the sweet stuff per serving; sugar can feed the bad bacteria in your gut. You can also try adding your own fruit and a little honey to plain yogurt. Throwing some raspberries on top of plain yogurt gives you a prebiotic and probiotic meal all at once.

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Kefir

This smooth, slightly tangy, and sippable yogurt contains a dozen different types of live active cultures. It's also 99% lactose-free, making it easier to digest for those with intolerant tummies. Plus, with 8 to 11 grams of protein per cup (depending on the brand), it can help fill you up for around 100 calories. Kefir can be purchased in the dairy section of most supermarkets.

Kombucha tea

Fizzy, tangy, and a little like vinegar, kombucha has a cult following for a reason. The tea gets its natural carbonation from the "scooby" (that float-y thing you see in some bottled varieties), which is actually the bacteria and yeast that ferment the drink and creates the probiotics. *Stick to store-bought kombucha; it's tough to keep the tea sanitary when you make it yourself, and homebrewed kombucha has been linked to nausea and even toxicity.* Also note that due to the fermentation process, kombucha contains trace amounts of alcohol. Look for raw kombucha with low sugar content for the best benefits. Kombucha can be found at most grocery stores and is usually in the refrigerated part of the produce section. It should not be pasteurized as this kills the probiotics living in the bottle. Good brands to choose: GT's Enlightened Organic Raw Kombucha, Brew Dr. Kombucha, Health-Ade Kombucha.



Sauerkraut

This cabbage condiment can frequently be found atop a mighty hot dog, but its roots trace all the way back to the 4th century B.C. Cabbage was fermented to preserve the veggie, resulting in what we all know as sauerkraut. Modern techniques for canning sauerkraut result in a product packed in a vinegar solution without live, active bacteria in the mix. For most probiotic power, eat fresh sauerkraut (look for live cultures on the label or buy it in the refrigerated section).

Pickles

Fermenting a cucumber into a pickle amps up a cuke's powers, infusing the crunchy veggie with probiotics. Like sauerkraut, not all pickles offer the good bacteria, though. Look for those made with brine (salt and water) rather than vinegar. These brands will list "live cultures" on the label (like Bubbies brand) and will be in the refrigerator section of the grocery store (usually near the deli). *One warning: remember that pickles are salty—one dill can easily offer up more than 10% of your sodium needs in a day.*

Kimchi

This Korean staple relies on lactic acid fermentation (also called lacto-fermentation) to turn cabbage or other vegetables into a spicy, pungent side dish that's packed with vitamin C. Order it at Korean restaurants or buy it in the refrigerated section of your grocery store. Then, use it to spike veggie-laden rice bowls, top on soup, or serve alongside meat.

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Log and Prize Form. August 15 to 21, 2022



Check appropriate box as you choose prebiotics and probiotics every day. Add totals at bottom of log form. No registration necessary. Please complete the following log and prize form in full. Return it to Mary Harrington at mharrington@mma.org OR mail to Mary at MIIA, 3 Center Plaza, Suite 610, Boston, MA 02108 by August 31, 2022. All log forms must be unique in the case where a spouse or dependent is also participating.

Prebiotics Goal: 10 different kinds by end of the week						Probiotics Goal: at least 1 probiotic every day and 3 different kinds by end of the week						
	Legumes	Fruits	Veggies	Whole grains	Nuts Seeds	Yogurt	Kefir	Pickles	Sauerkraut	Miso	Kimchi	Kombucha
Monday, August 15												
Tuesday, August 16												
Wednesday, August 17												
Thursday, August 18												
Friday, August 19												
Saturday, August 20												
Sunday, August 21												
Total number for week												

Name _____ Employer _____

MIIA/BCBS subscriber: Yes No

Email _____ Phone _____

Mailing address _____

Prize choice. Choose 1st and 2nd choices. If you don't specify, we will choose your prize. [Click](#) to view below prizes. Can also view at emiia.org. Click on Well Aware, then click on Incentives. Only MIIA/BCBS members eligible for prizes.

- | | | |
|---|---|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Nature Sound Spa | <input type="checkbox"/> First aid kit | <input type="checkbox"/> Self-massage balls (set of 2) |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Pet Lovers travel kit | <input type="checkbox"/> Zuma cooler backpack | <input type="checkbox"/> Salad and Pasta Pals |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Outdoor headlamp | <input type="checkbox"/> Fleece Blanket | <input type="checkbox"/> Sinus Soother |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Slope Messenger Bag | <input type="checkbox"/> Oven mitt | <input type="checkbox"/> Under Armour® 24 oz. Dominate Water Bottle |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Wind chimes | <input type="checkbox"/> Hand warmers (package of 10) | <input type="checkbox"/> Reflector Vest |
| <input type="checkbox"/> VODAPOD 32-ounce Water Bottle with Time Marker | <input type="checkbox"/> Bamboo cutting board | |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Shake it work out bottle | <input type="checkbox"/> Camper 34 oz. Stainless Steel Vacuum Container | |

Open to all employees, only MIIA/BCBS members are eligible for prizes.