

What's the GUT Going On??

The health of our guts as we age is a cornerstone of healthy aging. As we age, our gut health matters because the trillions of microbes play a crucial role in digesting and absorption of nutrients from food to fighting harmful pathogens. Changes in the microbiome's balance can affect our overall health.

Influencing our immune system, heart health and quality of life. Our digestive tract naturally slows down, produces less acid, shifts in the gut bacteria and our gut biome. Leading to constipation, gastroesophageal reflux (GERD) or acid reflux, nutrient malabsorption, increased food sensitivities, to even diverticulosis. As we age, we notice digesting foods has a different meaning. Less tolerance for spices, altered appetite, changes in the taste buds and olfactory senses. Learning to navigate these changes is essential for maintaining vitality throughout our senior years. Supporting a healthy gut through diet and lifestyle is an important step toward maintaining vitality as we age.

Strategies for Healthy Gut and Gastrointestinal (GI) system:

Fiber: Consume adequate amount of fiber, 21 grams for women and 30 grams per day for men for healthy, for routine bowels to avoid constipation. Focus on whole grains, fresh or frozen fruits and vegetables with plenty of water.

Hydration: Fluids keep digestion moving smoothly, help fiber work effectively and overall good hydration helps with digestion and absorption of all nutrients. Drink eight, 8-ounces of water per day.

Practice **Mindful Eating** by consuming smaller, more frequent meals, limited foods that are ultra-processed, excess caffeine, spicy and high in fat and sodium (salt). Avoid lying down for 2 hours after a meal. Regular exercise keeps things moving through the GI system and it can also reduce inflammation. These suggestions assist with GERD (heart burn; acid reflux) If persistent, reflux may damage your esophagus over time as the lower esophageal sphincter weakens.

Be aware of increased food sensitivities to dairy, fatty foods, spices and alcohol over time indicate changes in available digestive enzymes and the good bacteria in your gut biome which result in gas and bloating. Limit foods high in sugar and artificial sweeteners as they lead to gut inflammation. Overall eat in moderation!!!!

In addition to your diet, understanding the brain-gut connection. Reducing your stress level can lead to a healthy GI system. Practice relaxation techniques like mediation, yoga, tai chi. Routine exercises, from walking, biking to senior workout class. Prioritizing sleep can support healthy guts to include probiotics like yogurt, kefir, and sauerkraut daily.

Spinach and Feta Pasta by Dominic Smith Serves 4

- 1-pound wide noodles
- 2 T olive oil, plus extra to drizzle
- 1 medium red onion, finely chopped
- 2-3 cloves of garlic, thinly sliced
- 2 lemons, finely grated zest
- ¼ cup lemon juice
- ½ cup grated parmesan cheese
- 10 ounces fresh spinach
- Flat leaf parsley for serving

1. Cook pasta according to instructions. Drain. Reserve 1 cup cooking water.

2. Heat oil in large frypan over high heat. Add butter, cook until butter begins to foam. Add onion and garlic, stir occasionally, 4-5 minutes until onions soften

3. Add lemon zest and juice, reserved pasta water and both cheeses. Cook, stirring continuously for 1-2 minutes, until feta has melted. Add cooked pasta, toss with parsley and extra Feta cheese and drizzle with olive oil. Serve.

References: centerwellprimarycare.com/en/resources/navigating-digestive-changes-a-seniors-guide-to-better-gut-health-and-lifelong-vitality, Harvard Health Healthy gut, healthier aging - Harvard Healthful 18, 2023

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