

You might think of your digestive tract as nothing more than a food processor—a place where your food gets broken down. But our gut plays a vital role in our overall health beyond digesting food. This 30-foot tube running through us is actually “open” to the environment. It acts as a gatekeeper, determining which substances do or do not belong in our bodies. As such, gut health is essential to our immune system. It also plays a significant role in our detoxification processes.

Yes. Our digestive tract is a busy place—and a space shared with our microflora. In fact, we have about 500 species of bacteria comprising trillions of microbes living inside each of us. Many of these microbes may be familiar to you, such as Lactobacilli and Bifidobacteria.

Known as probiotics, these “good bugs” are like perfect house guests; they make our shared environment better by helping with important tasks. For example, they help digest food, absorb nutrients, synthesize certain vitamins, and are an essential part of our immune system. They also help maintain balanced blood sugar, support healthy elimination, and impact our mood and even our food cravings. In addition, they help prevent pathogenic microbes, the opportunistic “bad guys,” from taking over.

Nurture the good

To keep the digestive tract working well, you need to continually replenish the good bugs. Because, like good house guests, their stay is only temporary. Further, certain lifestyle factors can disrupt the balance of good-to-bad bacteria. Luckily, you can replenish your healthy bacteria efficiently and cost-effectively through your diet. Specifically, eating cultured or fermented (probiotic) foods everyday helps your gut maintain a robust community of beneficial microbes. Your doctor may also recommend a particular probiotic supplement.

What are fermented foods?

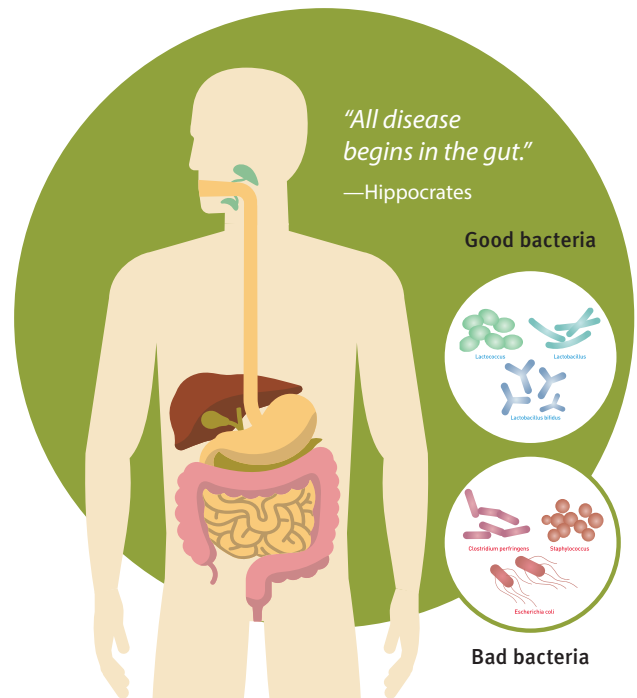
For ages, foods have been fermented as a way to preserve them and enhance flavor. When food is fermented, bacteria feed on the sugars and starches found in plant foods, producing lactic acid, a natural preservative. The food also becomes a rich source of the beneficial bugs—as long as the food is not filtered, heated, or canned in processing or at home.

Feeding the good bugs with prebiotics

Just like us, microbes need feeding regularly. And, like us, beneficial microbes thrive on a diet of fiber-rich plant foods, especially certain components of fiber, known as prebiotics. Prebiotics are a type of indigestible carbohydrate found in many whole foods. Because we can't digest these fibers, they pass through our small intestine and provide a feast for the good bugs in the colon.

In this way, prebiotics fuel your good bacteria and increase your ratio of good-to-bad bacteria. Keep in mind that in contrast, the bad bacteria thrive on a diet high in sugars and processed foods.

So, next time you eat, think about the fact that you're not just feeding yourself. You're also feeding either your beneficial microbes or the opportunistic bad microbes. Which will you feed?



What's bad news for good bugs?

- Antibiotics
- Prescription drugs
- Over-the-counter medications
- Alcohol
- Excess sugar
- Processed foods
- Stress
- Pathogenic organisms

References

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The importance of gut health

Maintaining a healthy gastrointestinal tract is essential for not only digesting and absorbing food but also for overall health. In fact, an unhealthy gut may impact our food cravings, our weight, our ability to neutralize toxins, and even our mood. And, because most of our immune system is in our gastrointestinal tract, an unhealthy gut can make us prone to infections, autoimmune conditions, and systemic inflammation—setting the stage for chronic illness.

Fortunately, the FirstLine Therapy meal plan is gut-supportive. By following the plan, you avoid refined sugar and processed foods, which feed the unfriendly microbes in our gut, helping them thrive. These foods, as well as alcohol, are also a threat to our beneficial gut microbes, such as Lactobacilli and Bifidobacteria. These “good bugs” keep us and our gastrointestinal tract healthy.

Fuel for the “good bugs”

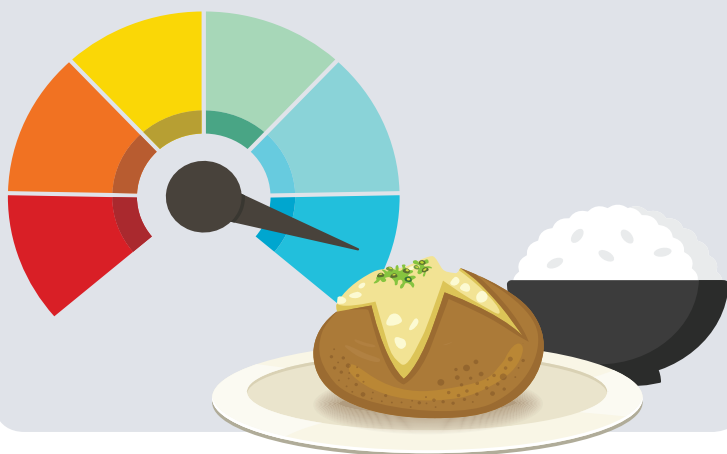
The FirstLine Therapy plan includes many cultured or fermented foods, which help foster a robust community of the good bugs. Abundant in fiber-rich plant foods, it also includes many sources of prebiotics, food for these desirable bugs. So your FirstLine Therapy food plan is a healthy way to fuel yourself—and your gut.

Getting started

While many of the gut-friendly foods may be familiar, many may be new additions to your diet. Experiment and try as many of these as you can. By being a little creative, you’ll find it easy to add these valuable foods into your everyday life. If needed, take small steps. For the fermented foods, consuming just a few tablespoons each day is an excellent way to start. For the prebiotic foods, try to include at least one of these items when you cook a meal. For salads, try to add at least two of these foods.

Cook and cool

Potatoes and rice can also be gut-healthy, if prepared properly. After cooking, simply wait to eat these items until they have completely cooled. Cooling converts some of the starch into “resistant starch,” which resists digestion. Instead, it passes through the intestines unchanged, providing fuel for the good bugs in the colon. Resistant starch also provides a feeling of fullness while lowering blood sugar response. So cook and cool!



Probiotic Foods	Prebiotic Foods
Acidophilus milk	Asparagus
Buttermilk	Bananas (green)*
Cottage cheese	Dandelion greens
Fermented meats	Eggplant
Fermented vegetables	Endive*
Kefir	Garlic*
Kimchi	Jerusalem artichokes* (AKA “sunchokes”)
Miso	Jicama
Natto	Leeks
Pickled vegetables (raw)	Legumes*
Sauerkraut	Oats
Tempeh	Onions*
Yogurt	Peas
	Radicchio*
	Whole grains

Source: Jackson F. Prebiotin. Foods Containing Prebiotics. Available at www.prebiotin.com/foods-containing-probiotics. Accessed May 23, 2017.

Probiotic food shopping tips

You’ll find many options at the grocery store for most of the FirstLine Therapy probiotic foods. However, not all of these will qualify as gut-friendly. Most of these fermented foods no longer have live cultures, because they were heated or pasteurized to make them shelf-stable or to extend their shelf life.

Here are some things to look for:

- The terms “active live cultures”
- Organic certification
- Items should be refrigerated

Prebiotic food shopping

While all prebiotics are plant fiber, not all fiber is a prebiotic. Focus on the listed items, especially the more prebiotic-rich items. And, ideally, eat them raw, if appropriate.

Resources

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