



CHAPTER 5:

PRACTICAL SOLUTIONS FOR OPTIMIZING YOUR GUT HEALTH

In this chapter you will learn and be able to understand:

Nutritional support and hydration

Dietary Recommendations

Lifestyle support – stress, exercise and sleep

NUTRITIONAL SUPPORT

Hydration:

Drinking sufficient water aids in digestion and the elimination of waste through urine and sweat.

- **Water:** Aim for 8 cups of water per day or 2 – 3 litres. This amount can include your intake of herbal teas, tea and coffee.
- **Chamomile tea:** soothes inflammation in the mucous membranes of the digestive tract and relieves diarrhoea, constipation and abdominal cramping. Look for organic, whole-flowered chamomile tea to get the most benefit. Use one tablespoon steeped in hot water and you can drink up to 4 cups per day.
- **Green tea:** rich in antioxidants, green tea supports detoxification and can improve liver function.
- **Peppermint tea:** soothes inflammation in the mucous membranes of the digestive tract and calms down the nervous system. It is also antimicrobial against pathogenic bacteria and helps to reduce abdominal pain and indigestion. Not suitable if you have reflux or heartburn.
- **Coffee:** ensure to drink 1 hour awake from waking as caffeine increases your cortisol levels (which are already high during the first hour of waking). Excess cortisol contributes to the stress load on the body leading to increased inflammation.
- **Alcohol:** Alcohol alters the liver's ability to detoxify toxins from the body and contributes to inflammatory bacteria production with excess intake.

NUTRITIONAL SUPPORT

Dietary Recommendations:

When eating more fibrous foods, I recommend starting to eat smaller amounts and cook your vegetables to reduce the chances of bloating and gas.

- **Meal timing:** Ensure you allow adequate time between meals (3 - 4 hours) for your body to complete the digestive process. Avoid snacks or calorie-containing beverages for at least three hours after each meal. Additionally, allow several hours between your last meal of the day and bedtime to prevent digestive issues and sleep disruptions.
- **Fibre Intake:** Consuming high-fiber foods helps maintain bowel regularity, crucial for the excretion of waste and toxins.
- **Limiting Processed Foods:** Reduce your intake of these foods as they contribute to dysbiotic bacteria and fungi and cause inflammation of the gut.
- **Aim for 30 different plant foods (vegetables, fruits, nuts, seeds and whole grains) per week:** increases your fibre intake, the diversity of plant fibres and beneficial compounds that support the gut microbiome. This can be done easily, let me break it down for you:
 - **Breakfast:** Smoothie (blueberries, spinach, milk of choice, avocado and chia seeds) already gives you 5 different plant foods.
 - **Lunch:** 2 cups mesclun salad mix, cucumber, tomato, beans, quinoa and a source of protein = 5 plant foods
 - **Dinner:** source of protein, broccoli, cauliflower, mashed potato, carrots, peas = 5 plant foods.
- **Leafy Greens:** Vegetables like spinach and kale are high in vitamins and antioxidants that support liver health.
- **Cruciferous Vegetables:** Broccoli, Brussels sprouts, and cauliflower contain compounds that enhance liver detoxification enzymes.
- **Garlic and Onions:** These contain sulfur compounds that help activate liver enzymes responsible for expelling toxins.

NUTRITIONAL SUPPORT

Dietary Recommendations:

- **Legumes:** beans, lentils, and chickpeas, are rich in oligosaccharides, a type of prebiotic.
 - Aim to start consuming these 2 - 3 times per week until you can eat them every day. Always wash and drain canned legumes.
 - A serving size to start with is a 1/4 cup and build yourself up to a 3/4 cup serving daily to prevent bloating and gas.
 - I recommend eating from dried; soak your beans for 48 hours (changing the water and rinsing every 12 hours) and then pressure cook for 30 minutes. If you do not have a pressure cooker, you can boil them on the stove for the same time.
 - Preparing your own beans dramatically decreases the compounds that are known to cause gas and bloating.
- **Protein:** include lean sources of protein and consume fatty fish 2 - 3 times per week.
- **Fermented foods (if tolerated):** yoghurt, kimchi, sauerkraut and fermented no-added-sugar beverages such as kombucha.
- **Nuts and seeds:** are amazing sources of healthy fats and contain a variety of vitamins and minerals such as zinc and magnesium which are important for overall health.
- **Gluten and dairy:** if your GI MAP indicates increased inflammation and leaky gut due to high zonulin, please avoid gluten and dairy for at least 2 months to allow for your gut to heal. Gluten and dairy can be inflammatory when the gut lining is compromised due to inflammation, dysbiosis and reduced digestive capacity.

LIFESTYLE SUPPORT

Stress

- Practise mindfulness or meditation techniques like listening to relaxing music and deep breathing. You can download the **InsightTimer** app which is free.
- Choose a relaxing activity that makes you slow down such as walking in nature (research shows that walking barefoot in nature reduces stress) , reading a book, getting a massage or having a bath.
- Make time for you! Remember, it is OKAY to say NO to plans if you need to.

4-7-8 Breathing Technique:

How to do it:

1. Sit in a comfortable position. Place the tip of your tongue on the roof of your mouth just behind your front teeth.
2. Breathe gently through your nose for 4 seconds.
3. Retain your breath for 7 seconds.
4. Exhale forcefully through your mouth, pursing your lips and making a whooshing sound, for 8 seconds.
5. Repeat the cycle up to 4 times. Increase your repetitions as you become comfortable with the exercise.

When to do it:

- Twice daily
- When you feel stressed or anxious
- At bedtime and when you have trouble getting back to sleep

Sleep

- **Blood sugar levels:** ensure that you have eaten 3 main meals and 1 - 2 snacks between to balance your blood sugar levels. Unbalanced blood sugars can disrupt your sleep and alter the gut microbiome.
- **Coffee and caffeinated beverages:** avoid drinking coffee before midday as the caffeine can disrupt your sleep especially if you are sensitive to caffeine. Other drinks such as red bull and mother energy drinks should be avoided as they are very high caffeine and other substances that disrupt your sleep hormones.
- **Turn off your devices:** turn off all devices 30 minutes to an hour before bed to limit your exposure to blue lights which is known to disrupt sleep onset hormones. Read a book or listen to some relaxing music instead.
- **Create a bedtime routine you can stick to:** practicing good bed time habits such as turning off devices, going to bed early and relaxing activities have been shown to improve your sleep onset, duration and quality.

LIFESTYLE SUPPORT

Other Helpful Tips

- **Sunshine:** boostd vitamin D production; it also helps maintain a balanced circadian rhythm. Disruptions in this cycle are linked to immune imbalances and chronic inflammation. Morning sunlight exposure can reduce inflammation and support the immune system by reinforcing the circadian rhythm. Additionally, sunlight exposure alters the gut microbiome, especially in those deficient in vitamin D. The below chart is a guide on how long you should spend in the sun:

	<i>Summer</i>	<i>Spring/Autumn</i>	<i>Winter</i>
<i>Fair skin</i>	10 minutes	20 minutes	30 minutes
<i>Dark skin</i>	20 minutes	60 minutes	90 minutes

- **Think twice about antibiotics:** If your doctor recommends antibiotics, ask if there are other options. Remember that sometimes antibiotics are warranted, but sometimes there are better options.



**Please email me for support or call
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