00:00:03 Announcer

The Missouri State Journal, a weekly program keeping you in touch with Missouri State University.

00:00:10 Emily Yeap

A healthy gut (your gastrointestinal tract) helps ensure your overall health and well-being. You want to have a good balance of gut bacteria to digest and absorb nutrients effectively.

What you eat daily greatly affects gut health.

Registered dietitian [Natalia Allen](https://search.missouristate.edu/people/natalieallen) talks about gut health and how to improve it through diet and nutrition. She’s also clinical assistant professor of [nutrition and dietetics](https://phsm.missouristate.edu/NutritionDietetics/default.htm) at Missouri State University.

00:00:39 Natalie Allen

Gut health is referring to the bacteria that live in our gut, so our stomach and our small and large intestines. And, we know everybody has good and bad bacteria in their gut; millions of different kinds. And what we're hoping for a good gut health is that the healthy good bacteria outnumberwhat we would consider unhealthy or bad bacteria.

When a baby is born, their gut is sterile. But over time, depending on the diet and also depending on things like exercise patterns, do you smoke, how much you sleep, those things all affect gut health.

00:01:15 Emily Yeap

How much does gut health affect overall health?

00:01:19 Natalie Allen

We're learning more about gut health every day, so I would caution people first because some things you might read on the internet or social media make it sound like improving gut health will improve all of your health problems and that's not necessarily the case. But, we do know that improving gut health has many advantages, particularly in people that are experiencing gastrointestinal or stomach issues, so bloating or you're having diarrhea or you feel nauseous when you eat or things that are directly tied with the GI system, increasing or improving gut health can be greatly beneficial.

Other things we're exploring in the medical world … so we're seeing a tie between gut health and some other disorders, and the evidence looks promising, but we're not quite sure exactly how this is going to turn out. So for example, food allergies in children, there's some data that would show if we can improve a child's gut health at a young age, they're less likely to have severe food allergies as they get older, so it's very promising and we want to learn more about it, but we aren't all the way there yet saying you can improve your gut health and it's going to cure every ailment in your body. That's not true, at least not yet.

00:02:31 Emily Yeap

Allen highlights some foods that are good for gut health.

00:02:35 Natalie Allen

I would suggest every time if you take an antibiotic, for some reason you have a virus or an illness, an infection that you need an antibiotic, to certainly look at improving your gut health after that because the antibiotic is going to destroy the good and bad bacteria in your gut.

The foods that improve your gut health are also good for you in many other ways. So examples of those foods would be an apple … has good pre and probiotics. Pre and probiotics are found in lots of different foods and they work in two different ways. Some of these feed the good bacteria that's already in your gut, so it's going to encourage those to grow and expand and that's something we definitely want to see. And then the other way they work is that they provide the good bacteria. They are the good bacteria. And so eating a combination of pre and probiotic foods is the best way to improve your gut health.

So, an apple is a good idea. Beans, soy foods like edamame, yogurt, Kombucha is a drink that is high in pre and probiotics. You could also eat fermented foods like fermented cabbage, pickled onions, things like that. The vinegar is very good in those for you and good for your gut. So there's a variety of foods. But the advantage of all of these foods, is they also have other good nutrients in them. They have fiber, they have vitamins, they have protein. So, I always like to say, let's start with trying foods that we know are going to improve gut health. And then you can also try taking a prebiotic or a probiotic pill. Those can be helpful, but in some people they're not and the hard thing about the pre and prebiotic pill is in each individual's gut there's different bacteria they need, and we don't know exactly what's specifically in your gut so it's hard to say if the pill is going to help specifically you. It's not going to hurt so it's worth a try. Eventually, the goal is to do more personalized nutrition messages using something called nutrigenomics, where we could look in each individual's gut and say, OK, you're high in this bacteria and we want that down. You're low in this good bacteria and we want to add that and make a supplement that would be specific or tailored to each person's gut. But again, we're just not quite there yet.

00:04:57 Emily Yeap

That was registered dietitian Natalie Allen from Missouri State. I'm Emily Yeap for the Missouri State Journal.

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