

# Go with your Gut

Health in general stems from the stomach

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PREGNANCY ON DIET CONCEPT/THINKSTOCK



The importance of a healthy gut has received increasing media attention with more options available for maintaining this health and finding solutions to these issues. *AsiaSpa* talks to two experts, each taking a different approach.

## GOOD BACTERIA

For Soulla Chamberlain, the key to a healthy gut and general health is bacteria. She is an author, health coach, cooking instructor, certified Mindd practitioner, and creator and director of Star Anise Organic Wholefoods in Sydney and the city's first dedicated broth bar, Broth Bar & Larder.

Chamberlain's philosophy combines the wisdom of ancestral diets with the latest developments in nutritional medicine and science. She says, "Our health depends on the health of our gut, the entire gastrointestinal tract that runs



MASSAGE OIL POURING: OLINA QUENTIN/SHUTTERSTOCK

from the mouth to the anus. The health of our gut in turn depends on single-celled bacterial life forms that live there." This bacterial film is also referred to as microbiota, microbiome, microflora, gut flora, intestinal flora, microorganisms and intestinal bacteria.

Diversity of bacterial strains is also key. Chamberlain says, "More specifically the health of our gut depends on the number, balance, strains and location of bacteria that live there. The greater the diversity of bacterial strains in your body, the more your internal ecosystem can function properly and thrive. People with lower microbiome diversity have worse metabolic health and higher markers of inflammation."

What are the signs of a healthy gut? Chamberlain explains, "A well-functioning gut is one that can digest and absorb nutrients from food. We should be producing regular stools once to three

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~ Soulla Chamberlain

times per day without gas, bloating, pain or other symptoms." Problems usually arise when the balance of bacteria is disturbed typically in favour of the pathogenic bacteria, through lifestyle and diet choices. She says, "It is now supported in scientific literature that

there is a clear connection between the gut microbiome on the one hand and our immunity, digestive function, brain function, skin health and metabolism on the other."

## HEALTHY GUT TIPS

Eat a diet rich in nutrient-dense whole unprocessed foods, including meat, organ meats, dairy (if tolerated), bone broth, wild seafood, pastured eggs, vegetables, small amounts of seasonal fruit and unrefined herbs and spices. Chamberlain says, "In particular bone broth from the bones of pastured or wild animals heals and seals a leaky gut and provides a healthy mucosal lining on the gut wall." Fermented foods and drinks such as kefir, sauerkraut, kimchi, yogurt, cheese, beet



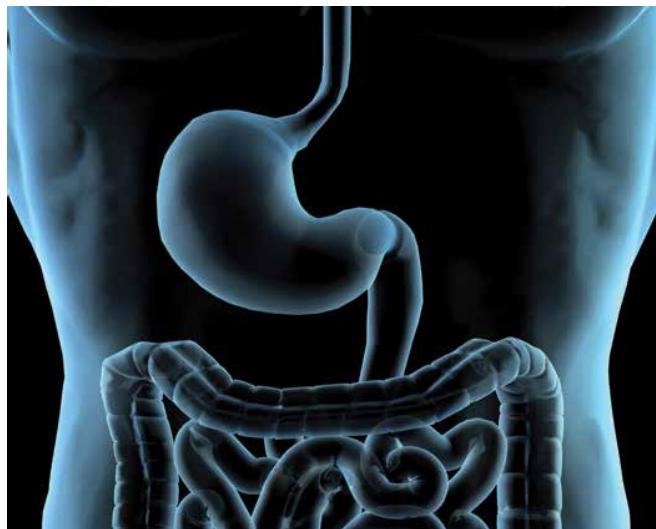
THIS PAGE: Soulla Chamberlain recommends consuming bone broth to promote gut health. OPPOSITE PAGE: Massaging the gut can have a powerful influence on the whole body; fermented foods are beneficial as well

kvass and kombucha are beneficial as they are rich in nutrients, enzymes and good bacteria.

Eliminate refined grains, as well as whole grains and legumes that are not prepared. Chamberlain says, "Grains and legumes should be properly prepared through soaking, sprouting or fermenting to reduce phytates naturally found in all grains and legumes that can lead to digestive havoc." Also eliminate refined sugars, concentrated sweeteners, fruit juice, alcohol, industrial seed oils and trans fats.

Prebiotics are also important. Chamberlain says, "Prebiotics are food for the probiotics already in our gut to keep them alive and healthy. So we need a diet rich in both." Prebiotic foods include onions, Jerusalem artichoke and fruits and vegetables high in soluble fibre. These include sweet potatoes, potatoes, Brussels sprouts, asparagus, turnips, mango, avocados, strawberries, apricots, as well as the latest talk of the town, anti-inflammatory, resistant starch.

However, Chamberlain doesn't consider supplements a necessity. She says, "Probiotic supplementation is not necessary for healthy people consuming a solid nutrient-dense, traditional, whole foods diet that includes both prebiotic-rich and a variety of fermented foods, which will provide all the probiotic bacteria you need." Of course there may be instances where probiotic supplementation may be



recommended therapeutically, such as during and after a course of antibiotics, times of stress or if microbial dysbiosis is present.

## THE WEB OF HEALTH

Taking a different approach is fascia therapy. The fascia is a continuous



THIS PAGE: Our gut health often determines overall well-being; probiotic supplementation is unnecessary if you consume a nutrient-dense, whole-food diet. OPPOSITE PAGE: The fascia approach often starts with the gut before moving to clavicles and the cranial fascia.

internal, interconnected, protective tissue with an appearance similar to a spider's web, that covers every part of us – the muscle, bone, nerve, artery vein and internal organ. From this perspective, each part of the body is connected to every other part. Although fascia therapy is far from mainstream yet, health and well-being sectors are paying more attention to it as a way of explaining and treating health issues, including the gut.

Richard Wickes, fascia expert, teacher and therapist at Fascia Clinic Asia says that fascia therapy is an integrated approach to treat the whole body by using the communicative property of the fascia to inform the therapist where the discomfort stems from, which means "listening to the body and its messages." The therapy uses a combination of Craniosacral Osteopathy, Barral Institute Osteopathic Visceral Manipulation, Myofascial Release Therapy and Barral Institute Listening Techniques.

Wickes says the practice requires a deep anatomical understanding of structures and how they relate to others



through three to five 60-minute sessions. "This means engaging in a dialogue with the body. Asking it in a language of touch questions and listening with the 'ears' in the palms to the response." Whereas a massage approach decides on the treatment as fixed menu, the fascia approach may start on the gut and move to clavicles and then the cranial fascia. He says, "This follows a chain of dysfunction that is not dissimilar to a blocked acupuncture meridian."

## DIGESTION ORIENTED THERAPY

In terms of digestion-oriented therapy Wickes says, "Abdominal adhesions of the fascia do not always cause problems, but they can kink, twist, or pull the intestines out of place, contributing to abdominal pain, poor gut motility, bowel obstruction and constipation." By affecting the

be affected and this will cause pain to the muscles and joints which are on that level. But organs have more than just one symptom, so the effect can sometimes be far from the cause." For example, it is common to fix neck pain by working on the gut as the pneumogastric nerve (also called the phrenic nerve) supplies the gut with feeling and stems from the neck.

The gut also has strong connections to the rest of the body via the spine. Wickes says, "Just massaging the gut is going to have a powerful influence on the whole body. Through gut treatment I have helped knee pain, back pain, testicular and bladder dysfunction, period pain and much more." It also works in reverse. "If we work directly with the gut it will probably be beneficial. I can work on the sacrum and support the gut, the renal system or Vagus nerve to improve many functions." 