



5 Signs of an Unhealthy Gut

A stomach ache might be one indication that something's off in your gastrointestinal (GI) tract, but did you know there are other less obvious markers, like acne and chronic fatigue, that can shed light on gut health? Here, we break down the reasons and research behind 5 common indicators:



- **Gastrointestinal issues**

This is probably what first comes to mind when you think of an unhealthy gut. Maybe you have abdominal pain, changes in bowel movements (i.e. diarrhea or constipation), or just generally feel uncomfortable. Those symptoms could be a sign that you have [Irritable Bowel Syndrome](#), or IBS. This common disorder could stem from how stressed you are and how well-rounded (or not) your diet is, but researchers agree that your gut microbiome plays a key role, too.

IBS typically reflects an imbalance of bacteria in the microbiome. Research has shown that people diagnosed with IBS have less gut microbiome diversity, particularly strains from the *Lactobacilli* and *Bifidobacteria* genera. One of the most compelling pieces of [evidence](#) is how frequently people develop IBS after experiencing an intestinal infection like the stomach flu. Once that GI tract gets out of whack, your gut microbiome shifts, and a disorder like IBS is more likely to develop.

Researchers have also studied what role probiotics can serve in the treatment of IBS, finding that [probiotics](#) have strong potential to alleviate symptoms and reduce hypersensitivity.

- **Depression**

There could be different reasons you're experiencing chronic depression or anxiety. It could be work stress, family life, or the world at large. But it could also be related to what's going on in your gut.

Your brain and gut are tightly connected, a relationship often called the "brain-gut axis." In fact, the gut is considered the "second brain," ruled by its own set of neurotransmitters that make up the [enteric nervous system](#) and whose main function is to regulate digestion. Interestingly, [the path goes both ways](#)—a disrupted GI tract can send a signal to the brain or a disrupted emotional state can send a signal to your GI tract. That means it can be hard to pinpoint whether a symptom is the cause or effect.

But [a recent study](#) showed that people with depression had lower levels of *Coprococcus* and

Dialister bacteria, and those who reported a high quality of life had efficient processing of the neurotransmitter dopamine within their gut microbiome. Essentially, the gut microbiomes differed significantly between those who had depression and those who didn't.

While the research is still evolving—we're seeing mostly correlation as opposed to a direct cause and effect—it's compelling evidence that the connection between gut health and mental health could be a strong one.

- **Autoimmune diseases**

If you have an [autoimmune disorder](#)—such as Crohn's or lupus—your body can't tell the difference between normal and foreign cells and ends up mistakenly attacking normal cells. And since your [gut microbiota](#) wields a lot of power—it can influence your immune response, intestinal permeability, and molecular mimicry (when host cells can't decipher between normal and foreign molecules)—there's evidence that your gut microbiome may have been part of the onset and amplification of an autoimmune disorder.

A [2011 study](#) zeroed in on zonulin, a protein that helps modulate the barrier of the digestive tract, basically keeping the good in and bad out. When the zonulin mechanism gets thrown off course, people who are genetically susceptible are more likely to develop autoimmune conditions. In fact, many [researchers](#) believe that the increase in autoimmune disorder rates is due in large part to shifts in our gut microbiota spurred by antibiotic use and poor diets.

- **Fatigue**

The recipe for feeling well-rested usually involves getting enough sleep, exercising regularly, and no screens for at least an hour before bed. But even if you're doing all those things, you might still have to bear with chronic fatigue—and the problem may stem from a gut imbalance.

A landmark [2017 study](#) found that people with chronic fatigue had abnormal levels of certain intestinal bacterial species, specifically *Faecalibacterium*, *Roseburia*, *Dorea*, *Coprococcus*, *Clostridium*, *Ruminococcus*, and *Coprobacillus*. And how much pain or fatigue you experience is tied to the levels of these bacteria. As one of the researchers [states](#), "Much like IBS, ME/CFS [myalgic encephalomyelitis/chronic fatigue syndrome] may involve a breakdown in the bidirectional communication between the brain and the gut mediated by bacteria, their metabolites, and the molecules they influence."

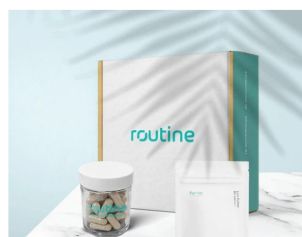
- **Problematic skin**

If you're battling with acne, eczema, or other common skin conditions, you might be quick to blame all the sugar you've been eating or not washing your face before bed. But your gut also plays a role in determining just much you glow.

Like the "talk" between your gut and brain, your [gut communicates with your skin](#), too. This happens by nutrient absorption, hormonal changes, your gut's influence on your immune system, and the release of certain metabolites. In [human studies](#), researchers found a connection between good-for-you bacteria and better skin. They saw decreased skin sensitivity and more hydrated skin when people consumed a *Lactobacillus* supplement. Another study found that when *Lactobacillus helveticus*-fermented milk whey was paired with human skin cultures, there was an increase in a moisturizing protein. More moisture? More glow.

On the other end of the spectrum, when your microbiome is off-kilter, certain amino acid by-products are produced, then accumulate in the skin, and affect its integrity. This can lead to issues with acne, psoriasis, and more. And less diversity in your microbiome can be problematic too. Multiple [studies](#) have shown that infants who develop atopic dermatitis later in life have less microbial diversity.

What can you do to better serve your microbiome? [Stress less](#), exercise regularly, eat a well-rounded, plant-rich diet, and take a [probiotic](#) every day. Your stomach, skin, sleep, and mental health will thank you for it.





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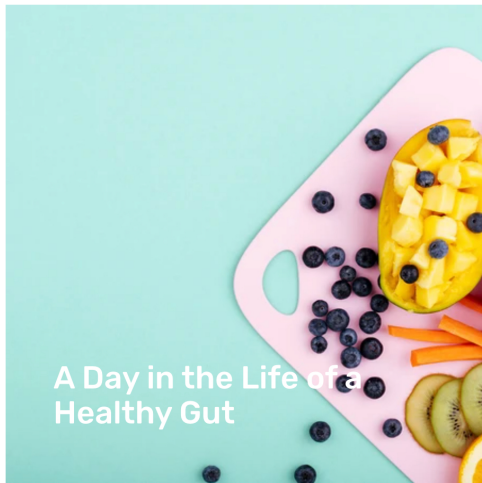
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