

The 9 Best Foods to Help Improve Digestion

What you eat—or don't—can play a big role in your digestion and ultimately your overall health. Add these foods to your diet for healthy digestion.

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Did you know that the health of your gut could actually be a window into the rest of your health? In recent years, research has linked what's happening along your digestive tract to a number of health outcomes—from [inflammation](#), [autoimmune disorders](#) and [skin conditions](#) to [type 2 diabetes](#) and [brain health](#). It's no wonder that gut health has become such a focus in the world of wellness.

When it comes to keeping your gut in tip-top shape, what you eat (or don't) plays a major role.

"While there is no one 'right' way to eat or a single 'gut-healthy' diet, regularly eating plant-based foods will do you and your digestion good," says Megan Rossi, Ph.D, RD, also known as the [Gut Health Doctor](#). "My top tip when it comes to what you eat: diversify your diet," she adds. Eating "a variety of foods means a variety of food for the bacteria that naturally live in your gut—aka your gut microbiome," says [Amanda Saucedo, M.S., RD](#).

Although variety is key, eating enough fiber-rich foods, which—no surprise—come from plants, can keep your digestive system regular (if you know what we mean!). [Studies have shown](#) that vegetarian and vegan diets lead to a more diverse and healthier gut microbiome than omnivorous diets. Lacey Dunn, M.S., RDN, owner of [Uplift Fit Nutrition](#) also recommends "limiting your intake of processed foods,

refined grains and artificial preservatives that can be troublesome to your gut and cause digestive upset."

While no single food will make or break your digestive health, there are some that come out on top when it comes to taking care of your gut. We've rounded up some of the best foods to include in your diet to support digestion—and how to use them.

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The Best Foods for Digestion

Oats

"What I love about oats is that they are a prebiotic food, they are inexpensive and they can be used for a variety of recipes, from your morning bowl of oatmeal to an ingredient in your banana bread," says Saucedo. [Prebiotics](#) are essentially the food for the good bacteria that live in your gut and keep your digestive system on track. Make one of our [Healthy Overnight Oats](#) for breakfast. For a savory option, try [Savory Oatmeal with Cheddar, Collards & Eggs](#).

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Sauerkraut

Sauerkraut and other fermented foods contain probiotics, which help replenish the inevitable loss of good bacteria in your gut (whether from stress, certain medications or even environmental factors). Probiotics [have been shown to reduce bloating, gas and other unwanted digestive symptoms](#). Just like eating a variety of foods is important to a healthy digestive system, so is getting a variety of strains of probiotics (there are hundreds, if not thousands!).

[One analysis](#) showed that sauerkraut contains up to 28 different strains, which is more than you'll find in most other probiotic-rich foods or any supplement. And you don't need a lot of sauerkraut to get benefits; one serving is typically just 2 tablespoons and can be added to anything from sandwiches to grain bowls. Try our [Apple, Sauerkraut & Cheddar Quesadillas](#).

Pineapple

"Pineapple is not just a delicious fruit to be enjoyed, it also may support healthy digestion because of the digestive enzyme it contains, called bromelain. Bromelain is known for breaking down proteins in the foods we eat, therefore helping ease the digestive process, leaving you less likely to feel gassy and bloated," says Kathleen Oswalt, RDN, owner of [eatloveTRIATHLON](#). [Bromelain has also been shown](#) to potentially counteract certain intestinal pathogens, reducing diarrhea and other digestive symptoms for some.

Chia Seeds

These tiny seeds are an incredible source of fiber. Just 1 ounce (about 2 tablespoons) contains 11 grams of fiber, which is more than one-third the daily recommended amount. It's the soluble fiber that actually helps them make a pudding-like texture when soaked in a liquid, and this same fiber helps absorb water in your gut. "This type of fiber not only helps promote and support beneficial bacteria in your gut, it can also reduce constipation by promoting healthy, regular bowel movements," says Oswalt. Try our [Mango Coconut Chia Pudding](#) for a digestion-friendly breakfast or snack.

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Apples

"Apples contain a fiber called pectin, which is very subtle on the gut compared to others like chicory root or inulin which may cause excessive bloating or abdominal discomfort in those with existing digestive conditions," says Andrew Akhaphong, M.S., RD, LD. [Pectin has also been](#) shown to provide protective benefits in the lining of the gut—potentially keeping out unwanted pathogens—and may enhance nutrient absorption. All varieties offer similar benefits, so choose the ones you like best.

Beans

Beans, beans, the magical fruit ... you know how the rest goes. But that slightly unpleasant side effect is actually a normal—and positive—response to eating a fiber called oligosaccharides. [The fiber in beans](#) is fermented by the good bacteria in your gut, which keeps them doing their important job of allowing nutrients into your bloodstream and keeping toxins out. "Mixed bean tins are one of my top cupboard staples. In fact one of my top tips for upping your fiber and plant diversity intake is to go for mixed beans with three or four different types, instead of just the kidney beans," says Rossi.

Broccoli

Broccoli, along with other cruciferous vegetables like cabbage, cauliflower and Brussels sprouts, has been linked to [better digestive health](#) and diversity of the microbiota in your gut. Cruciferous vegetables are also known for [reducing risk of colorectal cancer](#) and lowering [inflammation of the colon](#). It's hypothesized that intestinal fermentation of the prebiotic fiber in these vegetables helps form [short-chain fatty acids](#) that may reduce inflammation. This can come with a side of gas, so if you're not regularly eating cruciferous vegetables already, add them to your diet in small amounts to start.

Bananas

Bananas, especially those that are less ripe, contain [resistant starch](#), which can feed the good bacteria in your gut, improving the [gut microbiome](#). As they get riper, the resistant starch turns to sugar, but some beneficial starch remains. Bananas are such a versatile fruit, so get creative with how you eat them—for breakfast, as a pre-workout snack or dipped in chocolate or nut butter for dessert.

Water

OK, so we know this isn't technically a food, but we couldn't ignore the importance of hydration when it comes to healthy digestion. "Fluids work to help break down the food you eat so your body can absorb those nutrients to keep you in good health," says Oswalt. Water and fiber work together to help keep you regular. "Fiber pulls the fluid into the colon to help produce softer, bulkier stools that are easier to pass," explains Oswalt. Sometimes if people increase fiber intake too quickly and don't drink enough water, they can struggle with digestive symptoms as well. So, drink up! Don't love plain water? Try adding in fresh fruit, citrus or some herbs for a flavor boost.

The Bottom Line

A diverse, plant-rich diet is the best way to support healthy digestion. But adding these specific foods may give your gut a little extra boost. It's also important to remember that "gut health isn't just about what you eat. Sleep, stress and exercise can each have a big impact too," says Rossi. So, take into account your entire lifestyle and make sure to tackle sleep, stress and movement, in addition to food, for the best digestive health.