



Gut Health: Why a Little Mess Can Be a Good Thing

Most of us were raised to believe that “clean” means healthy. And while that’s often true, being too clean—especially in the kitchen—might be holding your gut back.

Your digestive system is home to trillions of microbes that help digest food, regulate inflammation, support your immune system, and even influence your mood. A thriving gut microbiome needs diversity: lots of different bacteria that flourish when exposed to a wide range of foods and natural environments.

But modern life is pretty sterile. Processed foods, antibacterial everything, and limited time outdoors can all chip away at the health of our gut microbes.

The Case for Getting a Little Messy

In recent years, researchers have found that our gut health is deeply tied to both what we eat and how much microbial exposure we get from the world around us.

Diets high in processed foods and low in fiber can reduce microbial diversity and fuel inflammation (1).

Over-sanitized environments may limit our exposure to helpful microbes that help “train” the immune system (2).

A lack of contact with nature—what scientists sometimes call the “biodiversity hypothesis”—may contribute to higher rates of allergies, autoimmune diseases, and inflammatory conditions (3).

On the flip side, fermented foods, high-fiber plants, and even a little safe exposure to the natural world (like gardening or walking barefoot in the grass) can help restore balance.

In one study, people who ate fermented foods like yogurt, kimchi, and kefir daily for 10 weeks saw a significant increase in microbiome diversity and a decrease in markers of inflammation (4). Another study showed that eating more fiber-rich foods led to an increase in short-chain fatty acids—compounds that support colon health, immunity, and blood sugar regulation (5).

What That Looks Like in Real Life

Sometimes, embracing a little “mess” can help support a healthier gut. Here’s what that might look like:

- **Skip the veggie wash:** A good rinse under running water is all most fruits and veggies need. You don’t need fancy produce washes—your gut actually benefits from small exposures to the natural microbes found on fresh, whole foods.
- **Choose fermented foods:** Yogurt, kefir, kimchi, sauerkraut, miso, and tempeh are rich in probiotics that help feed your gut.
- **Add more fiber-rich plants:** Beans, whole grains, veggies, nuts, and seeds help fuel the healthy gut bacteria already living in your body.
- **Get outside when you can:** Gardening, playing in the dirt, or walking barefoot on grass can gently expose you to helpful environmental microbes.

NOTE: If you have a weakened immune system or specific health conditions, check with your care team before changing your diet. Some people may need to avoid certain foods or microbial exposures for safety reasons.

References:

1. <https://www.nature.com/articles/s41579-019-0191>
2. <https://pmc.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/articles/PMC1448690>
3. <https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/24154724>
4. <https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/34256014>
5. <https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/27079516>

Kimchi Veggie Pancakes



These crispy, savory pancakes are packed with fiber and probiotic-rich kimchi. Great as a snack or light meal.

Ingredients:

- 1 cup chopped kimchi (plus 1–2 tbsp kimchi juice if available)
- 1/2 small zucchini, grated
- 1/4 cup chopped scallions
- 1/2 cup chickpea flour (or whole wheat flour)
- 1/4 cup water
- 1 egg (or flax egg: 1 tbsp flaxseed + 3 tbsp water)
- Pinch of salt and pepper
- Neutral oil for pan-frying

Instructions:

1. In a bowl, mix all ingredients into a thick batter.
2. Heat a little oil in a skillet over medium heat. Drop batter by spoonfuls and flatten slightly.
3. Cook 3–4 minutes per side until golden and crisp.
4. Serve with a simple dipping sauce (like soy sauce with rice vinegar and sesame oil).