



More Plants, More Power: Building a Happier Gut

Did you know your gut is home to trillions of bacteria? Collectively called your gut microbiota, these tiny microbes are far from harmful; in fact, they're essential for your health. They help break down food, produce certain vitamins, support your immune system, and even influence your mood. And when it comes to gut health, diversity is key. The more types of bacteria you have, the better.

Why Diversity in Your Gut Matters: Different bacteria specialize in digesting different foods. When your gut contains a wide range of bacteria, it's more resilient and better equipped to handle whatever you eat. However, modern diets are often dominated by ultra-processed foods (UPFs) based largely on engineered ingredients like corn, soy, and wheat, resulting in compromised gut diversity.

An imbalanced gut can contribute to inflammation, bloating, fatigue, and poor overall health. Emerging research has linked low microbiome diversity to obesity, type 2 diabetes, Alzheimer's disease, inflammatory bowel disease (IBD), and other chronic conditions. In contrast, a diverse gut microbiota is associated with numerous benefits, including stronger immune function, healthier aging and longevity, and even a reduced risk of cancer. The good news is that you can actively support and improve your gut health through the choices you make in your diet!

Eat the Rainbow: 20–30 Different Foods a Week
Experts recommend aiming for 20–30 different plant foods a week to encourage gut biodiversity. Think fresh fruits and vegetables, nuts, seeds and beans. That may sound like a lot, but with a little creativity, it's easier than you think.

Here are some ideas:

- **Switch it up daily:** Add one new fruit, vegetable, or legume to your meals. Even a handful of chopped herbs or a sprinkle of seeds counts!
- **Mix and match:** Instead of sticking with iceberg lettuce, toss in kale, spinach, or arugula. Swap your usual russet potato for a sweet potato, or try a purple one!
- **Vary your fruit:** Go for raspberries one day, blueberries the next, or choose a frozen mixed berry blend for built-in variety.
- **Explore types:** Different apple varieties, from Honeycrisp to Fuji, bring unique nutrients and flavors.

Routine is great for building healthy habits, but a little adventure goes a long way. By introducing new foods, you're also encouraging microbiome diversity.

A Challenge for You: At the end of the week, make a list of all the different plant foods you've eaten. You may be surprised by how many you've tried, and you might even discover new favorites along the way.

Your gut thrives on diversity, and by nourishing it, you're nourishing yourself. So, this week, why not make it a goal: 20–30 different plants on your plate. Your microbiome will thank you!

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Mediterranean Stuffed Peppers



This colorful recipe is packed with **10 different vegetables**, making it a delicious way to boost your gut health and add variety to your week. The best part is that you can easily swap in whatever veggies you love or have on hand. Think kale instead of spinach, sweet potato instead of carrot, or even add corn or peas for extra color. The more variety, the better for your microbiome!

Ingredients:

- 4 large or 6 medium bell peppers (red, yellow, or orange)
- 2 tbsp olive oil
- 1 small red onion, diced
- 2 cloves garlic, minced
- 1 celery stalk, finely chopped
- 1 carrot, grated
- 1 small eggplant, diced
- 1 zucchini, diced
- ½ cup mushrooms, diced
- 1 cup cherry tomatoes, halved
- 1 tsp smoked paprika
- 1 tsp oregano
- ½ tsp cumin
- Salt & pepper to taste
- 1 can (15 oz) lentils, rinsed & drained, or cooked from dry* (or try a new bean!)
- 1 cup baby spinach, chopped
- ½ cup crumbled feta (optional)
- Fresh parsley (or your favorite herb) for garnish

Instructions:

1. Preheat oven to 375°F. Slice tops off bell peppers and scoop out seeds and membranes. Place the peppers upright in a baking dish.
2. In a large skillet, heat olive oil over medium heat. Add onions, garlic, celery, and carrots. Cook for about 5 min, until softened.
3. Add eggplant, zucchini, mushrooms, and cherry tomatoes. Season with paprika, oregano, cumin, salt, and pepper. Cook for another 8–10 min until the vegetables are tender.
4. Stir in lentils and spinach. Cook for 2 minutes until spinach wilts. Add more seasoning to taste.
5. Spoon the filling into the hollowed bell peppers, packing tightly. Top with feta if using.
6. Cover with foil and bake for 30 minutes. Remove foil and bake 10 more min until peppers are tender and lightly browned on top.
7. Garnish with fresh parsley (or another herb) and serve warm.

* **To cook lentils:** Rinse 1 cup of dried lentils under cool water. Add them to a pot with 3 cups of water or broth, bring to a boil, then reduce the heat and simmer uncovered for 20–25 minutes, or until tender. Drain any excess liquid. Measure out 1½ cups of cooked lentils to use in the recipe.