

# GUT INSTINCT

## DOES YOUR GUT HEALTH AFFECT YOUR SLEEP?

We know that a good night's sleep has many benefits for the body and mind. Whilst we are sleeping, our bodies are working to regenerate and replenish. Sleep is just as important to our overall health as exercise and diet. To explain the affect the gut has on sleep, we will first discuss the Gut Brain Connection.

**The Gut-Brain Connection** is a term used to describe the physical and chemical link between these two organs. The health of your gut microbiome (bacteria in your gut) affects your brain health and vice versa.

**So the healthier our gut microbiome, the better it is for our brain.** Our gut microbiomes contain trillions of microbes (bacteria). It has been established that a healthy gut microbiome is one where -

- The proportion of 'good' bacteria outweighs the 'bad' bacteria
- There is a diverse range of different bacteria

To achieve this, our diet needs to be rich in vegetables, fruit and whole grains. These high fibre foods will help boost the good bacteria in your gut. Eating a wide variety of foods within these food groups will also lead to a more diverse microbiome. Consuming fermented foods like plain yoghurt, kimchi or sauerkraut can also enhance the function of the microbiome and reduce the number of disease-causing bacteria in the intestines.

Our gut microbes not only help regulate our circadian rhythms of our sleep cycle, but they also produce sleep-regulating hormones like melatonin, serotonin and dopamine which can help us have a better quality sleep. Looking after our good gut bacteria means we are looking after our brains which helps us in getting good night's sleep.



A healthy gut microbiome has a positive impact on the brain and therefore, sleep.

## IS THERE A BETTER SLEEPING POSITION FOR DIGESTION?



After a big meal, most of us would have a tendency to lie on our left side as it is more comfortable. **Why is this?**

Due to the shape of our stomach and its position in the body, it is thought that lying on your left side allows gravity to help move waste to your large intestine, therefore aiding digestion.

It is also thought that lying on this side can help reduce reflux as the stomach (and its acid) sits lower than the oesophagus in this position.

Lying on your front to sleep is the least favourable position as it compresses the organs of your digestive system.

# ARE OATS ACCEPTABLE AS PART OF A GLUTEN - FREE DIET?

Whether oats can be consumed as part of a gluten free diet has been somewhat controversial as oats contain avenin, a protein that distantly related to the protein in wheat.

In the USA and Europe, oat containing products can be labelled as gluten free. The Australian Food Standards however, do not allow use of the term gluten free for oat containing products, instead using the term 'wheat free'.

For those with **Coeliac disease**, a strict gluten free diet needs to be followed to prevent long term complications of this autoimmune condition. Whilst pure oats are safely tolerated by most with Coeliac disease there is the potential for oats to trigger a harmful immune response in some. It is for this reason that in Australia, current recommendation is that oats not be included as part of a gluten free diet. For those with Coeliac disease wishing to reintroduce oats into their diet, they should do so under medical supervision.

For people with an **intolerance to gluten**, the consumption of oats may result in gastrointestinal symptoms however, it is not life-threatening and will not cause damage to the small bowel.



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## A RECIPE FOR CONSTIPATION

Life can get busy and we can easily forget to drink enough water, eat enough high fibre foods and exercise - which can be a recipe for constipation. Constipation is a common complaint and can also arise due to hormonal changes in women (during pregnancy and menopause), as a side effect of some medications, as part of ageing (as the muscles in our digestive tract weaken) and as a symptom of certain digestive conditions (like irritable bowel syndrome , inflammatory bowel disease or bowel cancer).

In many cases, dietary and lifestyle changes can help relieve constipation, but if it persists and you are concerned, please see your doctor.

### DID YOU KNOW?

Two tablespoons of chia seeds a day can work wonders for constipation. Swallowed in a glass of water or in a pudding works better than if ground up (like in a smoothie).

## BERRY CHIA PUDDING



### Ingredients

- 1 1/2 cups of almond milk
- 1/3 cup of chia seeds
- 1/2 tsp vanilla extract
- 3 tbsp maple syrup
- seasonal berries

### Instructions

- combine the chia seeds & milk in a small bowl. Mix in the vanilla extract & maple syrup
- Let the mixture sit for 15 mins and then whisk to break up any clumps of chia seeds
- Cover the bowl and chill for several hours or overnight
- To serve, add berries +/- some yoghurt

Chia seeds are a good source of fibre, antioxidants, omega-3 fatty acids and protein.