

10 GUT-FRIENDLY FOODS AND DRINKS

If you experience digestive distress, incorporating these items into your diet can ease your discomfort.

BY SARAH C. LANGE

Between 25 million and 45 million people in the United States experience irritable bowel syndrome (IBS), marked by abdominal discomfort or pain as well as an altered bowel habit, according to the International Foundation for Functional Gastrointestinal Disorders. But new research suggests relief may come from simply changing the way you eat.

“There’s a lot of research coming out lately about our human gut microbiome, which is the bacteria that live within us,” says Alison Tierney, a clinical oncology dietitian at the UW Cancer Center at ProHealth Care in Waukesha. “What we’re finding is that the good bacteria in our body help us digest foods better; better absorb nutrients; synthesize vitamins; fight against intruders, such as the flu or toxic, cancer-forming carcinogens; boost our immunity; and regulate our metabolism.

“One of the best things you can do is eat a diet filled with colorful, plant-based foods, because the gut bacteria thrive off those foods,” she says, adding that in changing what you eat you can influence the bacteria within your body within just 24 hours. In addition to helping to maintain a healthy digestion, plant-based foods, such as fruits, vegetables, whole grains, legumes and beans, help combat obesity, Type 2 diabetes, heart disease, autoimmune diseases and some forms of cancer, she says.

So what specifically should you eat to please your gut bacteria and generally keep your tummy feeling all right? Tierney



5 FLAXSEEDS

Tierney says to look for ground flaxseeds or flaxseed meal, because you can’t absorb the nutrients in the full-seed form. “You can add it to oatmeal, smoothies, cereal or salads,” she says. “It’s a good way to keep your bowels regular and healthy.” Flaxseeds, she adds, contain omega-3s, which decrease inflammation.

6 WATER

“If you’re increasing your fiber and don’t have enough fluids, it can cause constipation,” Tierney warns. “Water’s super important to flush everything out of our system and keep us hydrated.”

7 BLUEBERRIES

This antioxidant-rich superfood enhances immune function through influencing bacteria.



8 BEANS

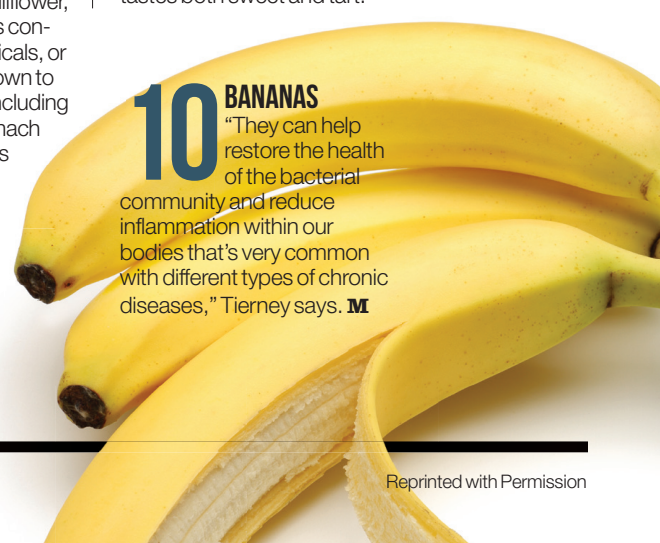
Kidney beans, black beans and garbanzo beans can strengthen intestine cells, improve absorption of micronutrients, and help with weight loss because they make you feel full, according to Tierney.

9 KOMBUCHA

This fermented tea includes probiotics and tastes both sweet and tart.

10 BANANAS

“They can help restore the health of the bacterial community and reduce inflammation within our bodies that’s very common with different types of chronic diseases,” Tierney says. **M**



1 JERUSALEM ARTICHOKES

They’re high in a type of fiber called inulin and have strong prebiotic potential, feeding gut bacteria in a good way, Tierney says. “Probiotics are the good, healthy bacteria within our gut,” she explains. “Prebiotics are the food for those probiotics, helping them work more efficiently.”

3 POLENTA

A high-fiber, corn-based complex carbohydrate, polenta includes insoluble fiber. As it travels through the colon, it’s fermented by different types of the gut flora, Tierney says.

4 CRUCIFEROUS VEGETABLES

This group consists of kale, cabbage, cauliflower, broccoli and bok choy. “These vegetables contain glucosinolates — they’re phytochemicals, or plant-based nutrients, that have been shown to reduce the risk of many types of cancer, including colon, bladder, breast, liver, lung and stomach cancer,” Tierney says. “The glucosinolates latch onto the carcinogens in our colon and get those harmful things out of our body through our stools,” she explains, adding that glucosinolates also aid in reducing inflammation in the gut.



2 FERMENTED PLANT-BASED FOODS

Think sauerkraut (fermented cabbage), kimchi (also fermented cabbage) or tempeh (fermented soybeans), all of which contain probiotics.

Tierney says that some of her patients with IBS who have switched to a whole-food, plant-based diet have seen all their IBS symptoms disappear. That said, if you continue to experience GI symptoms and changing your diet doesn’t help, she advises that you see your physician and ask for a referral to a dietitian.