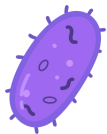
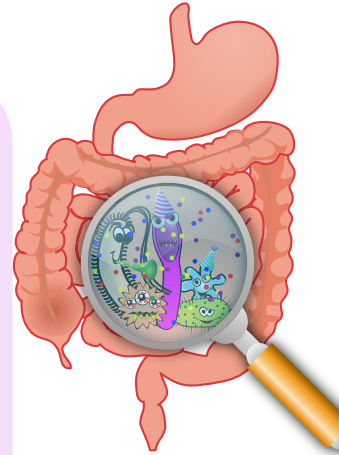


# OPTIMIZING GUT HEALTH

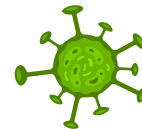
What is a gut microbiome and how can we keep it happy!

## What is the Gut Microbiome?

The gut microbiome is **an ecosystem of trillions of tiny living organisms**, including bacteria, that live in your digestive system. While “bacteria” might sound bad, many of these microbes are actually helpful. They play an important role in breaking down food, fermenting nutrients, producing vitamins, supporting your immune system, and protecting against harmful bacteria. A healthy gut microbiome is balanced and diverse, meaning it contains many different types of microbes. Diet, lifestyle, stress, and medications can all affect this balance.

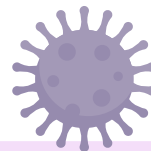


## How does your diet impact your gut health?



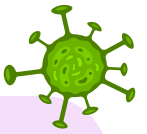
The foods you eat can either nourish or disrupt the microbiome. **Fiber**-rich foods like fruits, vegetables, legumes, and whole grains act as fuel for good bacteria, helping them grow and thrive. In contrast, diets high in processed foods, added sugars, and unhealthy fats can reduce microbial diversity and support unhealthy bacteria. **Fermented foods** like yogurt, kefir, and sauerkraut can also introduce beneficial microbes. By choosing a **balanced, varied diet, you help maintain a healthier gut environment**, which supports digestion, immunity, and overall well-being.

## Other lifestyle factors that influence our gut microbiome



- Regular physical activity promotes healthy bacteria growth and improves their effectiveness
- Certain medications such as antibiotics can disrupt healthy gut bacteria
- Your stress level has a direct impact on the function of our gut microbiome
- Good quality sleep promotes a healthy gut microbiome

# Prebiotics Vs. Probiotics



**Prebiotics act as a source of food for the beneficial microbes that live in our digestive system.**

By feeding the good bacteria, prebiotics support digestion, improve nutrient absorption, and help maintain a balanced gut microbiome.

Common prebiotic foods include garlic, onions, green peas, apples, nectarines, oats, barley, chickpeas, lentils and red kidney beans.



**Probiotics are a form of live bacteria that can be consumed to help maintain a healthy balance of microbes in your digestive system.**

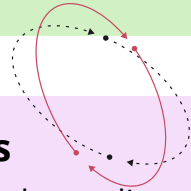
Probiotics can be especially helpful after illness or antibiotic use, when the volume of living bacteria may be reduced or disrupted.

Not all probiotic foods contain the same strains, so variety is helpful to support a diverse microbiome. Probiotics are naturally found in most fermented foods such as yogurt, kefir, aged cheeses, sauerkraut, kimchi and kombucha.

## Don't forget about fiber!!

Fiber feeds beneficial bacteria, helping them grow and complete their essential functions. Without enough fiber, these microbes decline.

For more information on sources of fiber and how much to be consuming each day, check out the October 2025 nutrition newsletter on the WCFHT website.  
<https://www.westchamplainfht.com/>



## Mind-Gut Axis

Your gut and brain are constantly sending signals to each other. This means your gut health can influence your mood, and your mental health can affect digestion.

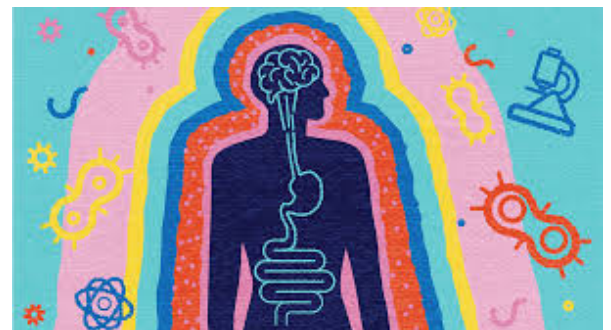
For example, stress can lead to gastrointestinal discomfort, while a balanced gut microbiome may support better mood and focus. Gut bacteria also help produce neurotransmitters like serotonin, which plays a role in happiness and well-being. Supporting your gut through diet, sleep, and stress management can positively impact both mental and digestive health.

## Probiotic Supplements

For those who have a hard time consuming probiotics from food sources, a supplement may be beneficial.

These supplements should be taken in conjunction with a healthy balanced diet. It is not recommended to take a probiotic supplement while taking antibiotic medication.

Always consult your doctor before starting any new supplements to make sure it is right for you.



## **Chickpea Salad**

A prebiotic rich salad that can be prepped in advance for easy lunches on the go!

### **Ingredients**

- 1 can of chickpeas
- 2 tbsp olive oil
- ⅓ cup cream cheese
- ½ cup diced green bell pepper
- ¼ cup diced red onions
- 2 green onion
- 1 tsp paprika
- 1 tsp turmeric
- pinch of salt



### **Instructions**

1. In a large bowl mash chickpeas using a potato masher or the back of a fork
2. Add in the rest of the ingredients (olive oil, cream cheese, green pepper, red onion, green onion, paprika, turmeric and a pinch of salt)
3. Stir all ingredients together!
4. Store in an air tight container for up to one week

Enjoy it on toast, topped with hot sauce, in a sandwich, with crackers or on its own!

Customize your chickpea salad with any other crunchy vegetables you may have on hand!