



For The Aged Care Sector

## NUTRITION FACT SHEET

# Nutrition For Gut Health In Aged Care

SUMMER 2024

Good gut health is important for feeling well, digestion and improving quality of life, especially as you get older. A balanced diet along with regular exercise can help keep the digestive system working properly and prevent common problems such as an upset stomach and constipation. In this fact sheet, we explore the key foods and nutrients that promotes good gut health.

### KEY MESSAGES

1. Essential nutrients can be found by eating a variety of **fibre rich** foods, incorporating **probiotics** and **prebiotics** and staying **hydrated**.
2. These nutrients can be easily obtained from a healthy **balanced diet** which includes all five food groups. Combined with regular **physical activity**, this can help keep your gut healthy.
3. When there are ongoing digestive issues or special dietary needs, consult a health professionals (i.e. doctor or dietitian) for safe, personalised guidance.

### WHY GUT HEALTH MATTERS

The gut helps break down food and absorb the nutrients your body needs. It is also home to a wide range of good gut bacteria that are essential for health and bad bacteria that can be harmful. Studies have found that good gut health can be linked to better digestion, stronger immune system, and managing conditions like type 2 diabetes and chronic inflammation. It may also help reduce

cognitive decline and the risk of dementia. As we age, the balance and variety of gut bacteria can decrease which might lead to poor nutrient absorption. Signs of poor gut health can include: stress, fatigue, abdominal pain, constipation or diarrhoea, bloating and frequent infections or illness.




### HOW TO MAINTAIN HEALTHY GUT?

#### Fibre

Fibre can add bulk to stools, which can reduce the risk of constipation, helps with digestion and absorption of nutrients. Eating a high fibre diet can also encourage the growth of healthy gut bacteria and may reduce inflammation. Fibre can be found in many plant based foods which can include:

- Whole grains (e.g bread, pasta, cereals)
- Fruits and vegetables
- Legumes (e.g beans, lentils)
- Nuts and seeds



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### Probiotics

Probiotics are live good bacteria that you can get from certain foods or supplements. They help maintain or restore the balance of good gut bacteria, especially if it has been affected by antibiotics, medications or illness. Fermented foods are rich in probiotics because they are made by breaking down sugars with bacteria or yeast.

Fermented foods can include:

- Yoghurt and kefir
- Kimchi, sauerkraut
- Kombucha
- Sourdough bread

### Prebiotics

Prebiotics are found in some foods or supplements and help feed the good bacteria already in the gut, which helps them grow and stay healthy. This helps to support a balanced gut.

Foods containing prebiotics can include:

- Banana (unripe)
- Oats
- Legumes
- Cooked and then cooled potatoes
- Onions, garlic, asparagus, leeks

### Hydration

Drinking plenty of water is great for your gut health. It helps breakdown food, making it easier for the body to absorb nutrients and keep stools soft to prevent constipation. It may also support a wider variety of healthy gut bacteria.

### Physical Activity

Regular exercise helps keep the digestive system healthy by promoting regular bowel movements and reducing constipation. It may also improve the balance of good gut bacteria.



### AN IMPORTANT NOTE

It is the best to seek advice from health professionals (i.e. doctor or dietitian) if you have ongoing digestive issues or special dietary needs before starting any new supplements or making changes to your diet, for a more individualised and safer approach.

For more information, please visit:

Gut Health | Better Health

<https://www.betterhealth.vic.gov.au/health/healthyliving/gut-health#gut-health-and-diet>

Salazar.N et al (2017). Nutrition and the gut microbiome in the elderly. Gut Microbes; 8(2):82-97

<https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC5390822/>

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