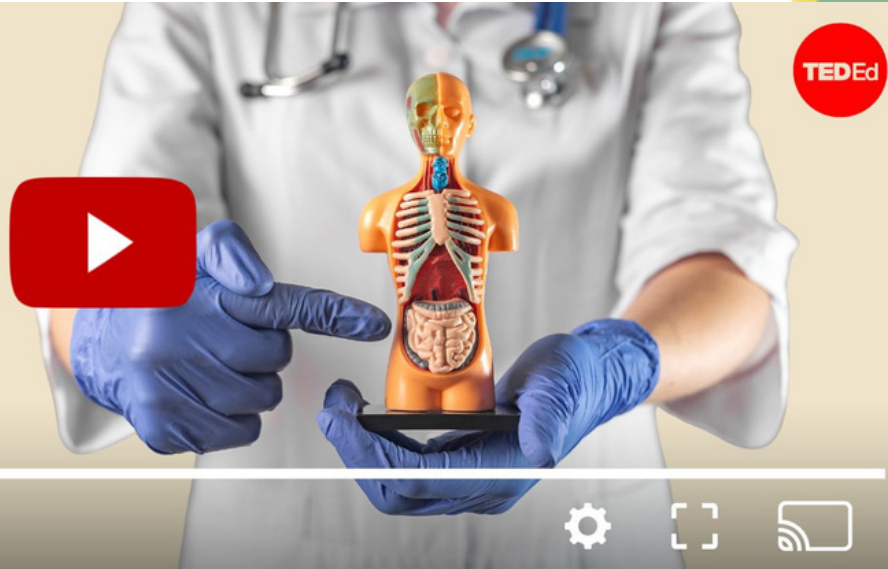


Take Care of YOU

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HOW THE DIGESTIVE SYSTEM WORKS



Gut Health – Part I

It's easy to think of the intestinal system as nothing more than a garbage chute—a disposal system for the leftover food and substances that our bodies don't need. But our digestive system deserves more credit than that, and instead, we should think of it as a conveyor belt, transporting essential nutrients, medications, energy, and hormones throughout the body.

The small and large intestines—which span an average of 20 feet and five feet in length, respectively—are hard at work absorbing nutrients into the bloodstream, supporting the immune system, maintaining overall health, and yes, eliminating waste.

A healthy gut is physically characterized by a robust intestinal lining and balanced bacterial environment. More abstractly, a healthy gut manifests through an effective metabolism, proper hormonal balance, and the quality of the body's immune response. In fact, as much as 70 percent of the immune system resides in the gut, meaning that a balanced and thriving digestive system is fundamental to our body's defenses against infections and maintaining our overall physical health.

But wait, there's more! The digestive system is also linked to energy levels, emotions, and mental well-being. Any disturbances to the gut's bacteria profile or its ability to effectively absorb nutrients can contribute to conditions such as anxiety, depression, fatigue, and mood swings.

An unhealthy gut acts like any other body part when it gets injured. It lets us know through physical symptoms such as nausea, constipation, indigestion, bloating, diarrhea, excess gas, etc. Quick detection and early intervention are important for managing and alleviating these symptoms and safeguarding overall health and well-being.

Optimal gut health requires more than mindful food choices and medications, though those are certainly important. It requires a holistic approach of preventive measures—recognizing digestion-related symptoms, being aware of common disorders (e.g. lactose intolerance, gastroesophageal reflux disease (GERD), irritable bowel syndrome (IBS), and hiatal hernia), and understanding the interconnectedness of digestive health and whole-body health.

A Few Gut Health Myth-Busters

MYTH: All gut bacteria are harmful.

TRUTH: A healthy gut has a balanced mixture of both beneficial and harmful bacteria.

MYTH: Gut health is solely influenced by diet.

TRUTH: Other factors include sleep, medications, stress, and physical activity.

MYTH: The stomach is where most nutrient absorption occurs.

TRUTH: The small intestine is primarily responsible for this process.

MYTH: Gut health is irrelevant to mental health.

TRUTH: The gut-brain connection is strong, and imbalances in gut bacteria can impact mental well-being.