Your gut health refers to the bacteria that live inside your digestive system and help your body conduct critical processes. Over the past few years, emerging research has shown just how wide-ranging your gut health is, and how poor gut health sustained over time has been linked to a whole host of illnesses or diseases, including diabetes, obesity, and chronic fatigue. With all of these effects, it’s important for you to know the signs of poor gut health so you can do something about it.

The most obvious sign of poor gut health is digestive issues. This can include excessive bloating, gas, irritable bowels, and/or diarrhea. This is perhaps the most direct effect of poor gut health; the bacteria in your intestines is not sufficiently balanced and therefore causes digestive problems. If you’re suffering from particularly noxious or overly frequent flatulence, you might want to take a look at some ways to improve your gut health.

Issues with your immune system are another indicator that your gut bacteria might be off. If you find yourself constantly getting sick or having low white-blood cell counts consistently, it might be a sign that you need to heal your gut.

Without getting into too much science, poor gut health results in an immune response from the body when half-digested food particles make it through the intestinal barrier and into the blood stream. When the immune system is being constantly engaged, it weakens, resulting in sickness and autoimmune disorders. It’s important to check with a doctor if you think you may be suffering from this; there are tests that can be performed on you to see if this is the case.

There are myriad ways poor gut health may manifest itself, including eczema or other skin conditions, diabetes, excessive weight gain/inability to lose weight, or even bad breath. If you’re experiencing any, or several, of these conditions, it may be at least partially attributable to poor gut health. Talk with your doctor or a nutritionist about improving your food intake.

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Quick ways to get yourself out of a bad mood

Woke up on the wrong side of the bed this morning? Sometimes that’s all it takes for your brain to decide it’s in a bad mood and little things, from the weather to spilling coffee on your shirt, are just going to make your day get worse. Don’t let that happen. Here are a few simple ways to kill that bad mood:

Try smiling.
Seriously. Smile at yourself in the mirror. Research shows that just turning that frown upside-down actually makes you more likely to experience a positive mood. Or why not try making a few goofy faces at yourself. See how funny you look? That’s bound to make you laugh.

Do something nice for someone else.
Doing something nice for others can make you feel good—even if you’re in a bad mood. So if trying to make yourself happy isn’t working, try making someone else happy. It could be something as simple as helping a coworker by opening a door if his or her hands are full. Every little bit helps.

Listen to music.
Find music that works for you and press play. Maybe that’s uplifting music, or maybe it’s something energetic to get your blood pumping. Listening to something you don’t know might help, too—our brains crave novelty, so a song you aren’t familiar with might be just what you need, rather than a familiar song that brings back a flood of sad memories.

Stop the momentum.
Unfortunately, once you recognize you’re in a bad mood, your brain continues to expect bad things—turning a bad mood into a bad day. So catch this before it starts, and make sure you don’t give your bad mood momentum. If you can, try and evaluate what put you in that bad mood, and try and put a positive spin on it—even if it’s “I’m motivated to do better next time”.

Don’t vent.
One of your first impulses may be to vent your frustration, but that’s actually a bad idea. Venting may feel cathartic in the moment, but it keeps your anger present rather than getting rid of it—which is, ultimately, what you want to do. So, try to channel that into more positive energy (like exercising) rather than negative (like yelling and punching stuff).

What are the first signs of cataracts?

(ND) As we age, our vision changes. Vision may become blurry and faces of loved ones become difficult to see. If you are experiencing these symptoms, you may have cataracts, a natural eye condition that usually forms as we age. If left untreated, cataracts can cause significant vision loss and blindness.

Cataracts affect over 2.5 million Canadians every year, but among patients who have cataracts, only 20 percent had a full understanding of their condition. They occur when the lens in the eye becomes cloudy from natural proteins that build up over time, leading to clouded vision, light sensitivity and fading of colours.

The only way to repair cataracts is surgery. Modern cataract surgery is a safe procedure where a surgeon replaces the natural clouded lens of the eye with an artificial lens. Nowadays, there is a variety of surgical lens options available to achieve individual vision goals.

If you’re considering cataract surgery, you need to have an informed conversation with your surgeon about your vision goals to select the cataract lens replacement that’s right for you. Visit your eye care professional to learn more about cataracts, cataract surgery and lens options.
Health Benefits of Prune Juice

We’ve all heard the jokes about prunes being a potent laxative, but all humor aside, the health benefits of prune juice are reason enough for it to be part of everyone’s diet. The nutritional content of prunes (dried plums) should not be overlooked, especially as age makes it increasingly difficult to maintain energy levels and overall health. Prune juice is rich in many of the nutrients the body needs, as well as the fiber needed to clear out toxins.

Vitamins

Prune juice contains several important vitamins that your body needs for optimum health, including vitamins A, C, E and K. Vitamin A (also called beta-carotene or retinol) is important for the health of the eyes. Vitamin K contains compounds that are necessary for strong bones, healthy cells and proper clotting of the blood.

Minerals

In addition to vitamins, prune juice also supplies several important minerals, such as iron and potassium. Iron is needed to carry oxygen throughout the body, to areas such as the various muscles and even the brain. Potassium helps lower blood pressure, and like iron, also helps supply oxygen to the brain.

Antioxidants

Prunes get their purple color from compounds called anthocyanins. Anthocyanins are a type of antioxidant that has been associated with reduced risk for both cancer and heart disease. Chlorogenic acid is another type of antioxidant in prune juice that helps slow the release of glucose into the bloodstream after eating.

Fibre

Prunes also contain fibre (both soluble and insoluble), which is useful for treating constipation. Soluble fibre absorbs water and adds bulk to the stool, enabling a person to feel fuller for longer. It also normalizes blood sugar levels by delaying glucose absorption, which can help prevent the onset of type 2 diabetes.

Grumpy Old Men may be more than a stereotype

Male Menopause. Does it exist? Depending on which site has the best algorithm so it appears at the top on your Internet search, the answer could be yes. If we dig a little deeper; however, other sources such as canadianhealthnetwork.ca and Vancouver Coastal Health (vch.ca) tell us that male menopause, often called andropause, is actually quite controversial.

Many health experts argue that there is no such thing. In that case, could a male be experiencing it? How would he know? And what could be done about it?

First thing’s first. Males do not experience a drastic drop in hormones like females do. Men do not ovulate for most of their lives and then suddenly stop. That’s why there is a great deal of skepticism about andropause. There is much debate about whether or not men really do go through a well-defined male menopause.

But as men get older, testosterone levels in the body gradually become lower and with this decrease comes its share of symptoms. A shortage can spell tiredness, low sex drive, loss of strength, increased body fat, increased irritability, mood swings and depression.

Research suggests that roughly two out of five men aged 40 or older experience symptoms that identify due to lower testosterone.

On the other hand, they could just be symptoms of other problems such as stress, diabetes or any number of other medical reasons.

The only way to diagnose a low testosterone level is by blood test. But there is significant variability between men so one man’s low testosterone may simply be average for another.

Before ordering the “miracle cure” you find in your internet search, try these tips:

- Get more exercise. The “feel good” endorphins released by physical activity can help overcome depression symptoms and other negative feelings.
- Eat a heart-healthy diet that focuses on fruits, vegetables, whole grains, lean proteins, nuts, and some low-fat or fat-free dairy products. Cut back on foods and beverages with added sugars.
- You may find it difficult to talk about, but if you are experiencing symptoms that can be associated with andropause, discuss your feelings with your doctor.
Feeling cold? Here are some reasons why

Everyone’s body reacts differently to temperature but some people feel cold all the time, no matter the season or setting. Here are reasons why that might be:

**Underweight**

Being underweight can leave you with a low body temperature because of a lack of adequate body fat to insulate you against colder temperatures. To maintain a low body weight your calorie intake would also need to be low, which would lower your metabolism, resulting in your body not generating enough heat.

**Poor circulation**

If it’s mostly your hands and feet that take the brunt of the cold temperatures, it could be the result of a circulation problem keeping an adequate amount of blood from flowing to your extremities.

**Hypothyroidism**

When your thyroid gland doesn’t produce enough thyroid hormone, your metabolic rate slows down and your body no longer produces sufficient heat. Additional symptoms of hypothyroidism include dry skin, thinning hair and low energy levels.

**Lack of sleep**

A lack of sleep can affect your circadian rhythm, which is responsible for regulating your metabolism, hormone levels, and body temperature, and also lowers your temperature when you go to sleep.

**Anemia**

One of the most common reasons for experiencing constant coldness is low iron levels. A lack of iron causes a decrease in blood circulation to your limbs, resulting in increased coldness, especially in the hands and feet. Other common symptoms of anemia include fatigue, pale skin, irregular heartbeat, and headaches.

**Dehydration**

If you lack sufficient water intake your body may not be able to produce the heat and energy required to keep you warm, leaving you more vulnerable to extreme temperatures.

If you find yourself feeling cold regardless of the season or the number of layers you wear to insulate yourself from the cold, it could be a symptom of an underlying condition and not just an aversion to chilly weather. Discuss concerns with your doctor.

(FC) Food insecurity is harmful to children, leading to absenteeism, trouble concentrating and lower grades and outcomes.

It’s hard to believe there are children in our wealthy country who go hungry. But according to Statistics Canada, food insecurity affects 1.15 million — or one in six — Canadian children under age 18.

Fortunately, there are programs that help feed hungry kids right here at home, like those from Canadian Feed The Children. The organization has launched a new campaign to provide 500,000 meals to children who need it most, especially at school. Here are just some of the ways school meals help kids learn:

**Healthier kids:** Especially for the youngest children, adequate nutrition provided in early childhood care and development centres has a huge impact on fostering healthy child development.

**Help for the whole family:** For families struggling to make ends meet, school meals can help out all family members, including moms, dads and siblings. They stretch food budgets so that pre-school children and parents all get more food. Plus, they are often combined with parental supports like nutrition training, career development and other opportunities to increase household income and outcomes.

**Kids make better food choices:** Well-designed school nutrition programs ensure that kids eat a diverse, balanced diet. Fresh fruits and vegetables – which may be expensive, scarce or uncommon in local diets – are important for short and long-term disease prevention.

**Kids learn better:** School meals offer an incentive for children to show up and stay in school. Kids with full tummies can concentrate better, have more energy, their memory and problem-solving skills are improved, and they show less disruptive behaviour. Long-term academic outcomes are also noted: lower dropout rates, higher graduation, better performance on standardized tests, and more.

Find more information at [feedchildren.ca](http://feedchildren.ca).
Sticking to structure can improve your health

Are you tired of doing the same thing day after day? Wish you could break free from your schedule and live more spontaneously? You might want to think twice. Studies have shown that following a routine may improve your health. Routines keep you grounded, responsible, and self-assured, all which contribute to better physical and mental well-being. Here are several reasons to stick to your routine.

**Better sleep.**
Sleep is an important part of a daily routine, and those who adhere to a schedule typically make time for consistent quality rest. Going to bed and waking up at the same time each day helps keep the body’s circadian rhythm in sync. In fact, a regular sleep schedule is one of the biggest contributors to health and longevity.

**Reduced stress.**
Living without structure can be confusing and worrisome. You’re faced with concern over whether you’ll get anything done or how to go about trying. You may even fear what the day will bring. With routines, there’s comfort in the familiar. Not only are you more apt to be productive when following a routine, but you’ll also alleviate the stress and anxiety that come from uncertainty.

**Increased confidence.**
A routine is something to be proud of. It takes time and effort to establish a day-to-day purpose and pathway, especially one that leads to an organized, fruitful lifestyle. Embrace your accomplishment and let it boost your ego. Knowing what to expect day in and day out helps build confidence.

**Easier weight maintenance.**
According to diet experts, a scheduled eating pattern is good for your waistline. People who eat at certain times of day, particularly those who sit down to enjoy a meal, choose healthy foods, chew slowly, and avoid overeating and binging, manage weight much easier than those who eat on the run without any regularity.

While a daily structure may be boring, it may have its perks, including better health. Routines promote mental and physical well-being and keep you feeling and doing your best day after day, year after year.

How to clean your routine in 2020

(NC) With a new year comes a new promise of becoming our best selves, both inside and out. According to the Natural Beauty Survey, Canadians are making a resolution of a different kind and cleaning our routines brands that provide environmentally friendly packaging, include more all natural ingredients and don’t test on animals.

Below are a few tips to help make the switch to a cleaner routine a little easier:

**Start with the tools you use.** Opt for toothbrushes made from sustainable materials, such as bamboo or recycled plastics. Use a microfibre face cloth or reusable rounds to wipe your makeup off instead of disposable cotton pads. Look into recycling options and centres for your empty product containers.

**Go natural.** If you want to avoid products with artificial fragrances, flavours and parabens this year, natural products are the way to go. Consider switching to products made of naturally derived ingredients.

**Be informed.** Don’t be afraid to do a little research before you buy. Check out a product’s website to learn more about the company’s policies and what they do to support your personal values. Sustainable packaging, ingredient sourcing practices and certifications are all things you can look for details about on a company’s website.
Swap in healthy goodness

One of the best things about home cooking is that you can make just about any dish healthier with some simple substitutions. Check out these super swaps to boost nutrition in your recipes while slashing calories, sugar and saturated fat.

Oat bran for flour
Making bread or muffins? Boost the nutrition and texture of your baked goods by swapping out some flour for oat bran. Oat bran is rich in fibre and protein. The protein and fibre will help keep you full, and the fibre can also lower cholesterol.

Bananas for butter
This big calorie-saver is a one-for-one swap that you can use in most baked goods. Take ripe (or even overripe) bananas and mash and use them in place of butter or oil. One cup of butter has 1,628 calories and 116 grams of saturated fat, but a cup of mashed bananas has just 200 calories and less than half a gram of saturated fat. Plus, bananas are packed with potassium, fibre and B vitamins. Your waistline will thank you, and your guests won’t notice any difference from standard recipes.

Applesauce for sugar
Want to really cut calories without losing flavour in your sweet treats? Consider using applesauce in place of sugar. One cup of unsweetened applesauce contains only about 100 calories, while a cup of sugar can pack in more than 770 calories. You can substitute applesauce for sugar in a 1:1 ratio, but for every cup of applesauce you use, reduce the amount of liquid in the recipe by 1/4 cup.

From sprouts to tempeh

Try adding these trending 2020 superfoods to your diet. You never know what your taste buds will tell you if you don’t try it:

Tempeh
Tempeh is considered a fermented food that produces a healthier gut and digestive system. It is loaded with key nutrients such as iron, riboflavin, magnesium, phosphorus and manganese. It has been shown to reduce bone loss, prevent oxidative stress and decrease cholesterol levels. When cooking with it, use it as you would tofu. It can be seasoned or marinated to amp up the flavour and then cooked and added to stir-fries, sandwiches, and wraps.

Small yet powerful, broccoli sprouts contain a high amount of sulforaphane that upregulates a specific enzyme complex called Nrf2. This upregulation leads to a large increase in the production of your body’s antioxidants such as glutathione and superoxide dismutase. Think of them like the superheroes fighting the crimes of inflammation in your body. You can grow broccoli sprouts at home. Buy sprouting seeds and jars and soak for six to eight hours. Water daily and within a week, you will have sprouts to add to your salads, smoothies and dishes.

Use your time to make a good impression wisely

Have you seen that comic illustration for the saying “Dress for the job you want, not the job you have”? The illustration shows people in an office with one person wearing a suit of armour, another a Batman costume, and another a Wonder Woman outfit. This may make you laugh, but there is indeed truth behind the adage of dressing for success. According to Forbes.com, studies have long demonstrated that people make a judgment based on their first impression of you within the first seven seconds of interaction. This means that whether you’re at a business meeting, or attending a networking event, you have just a few seconds to make a good first impression and establish yourself as the successful person you strive to be.

Here are a few tips to consider:
Smell you later. Limit use of cologne/perfume; it’s meant to compliment not overwhelm.

Keep it clean. Clothing should be clean and pressed. Invest in getting a suit that’s been tailored to your build. Nothing looks worse than a too baggy (or too tight) jacket or pants legs that puddle up at the ankles.

Dress for the occasion. If it calls for black tie on the invitation, they mean a tuxedo not a navy suit. If it’s a more casual event but you’re unsure of the attire, avoid dressing like it’s a Saturday morning coffee date with a friend.

Keep it simple. Accessories should be just that: extra. Make sure jewelry and belts are not too showy or distracting.

Dressing well is more than just clothing. Remember that how you speak and react in conversation is just as important as what you are wearing. Avoid coarse language and jokes, and keep your volume down. Try not to interrupt someone when he or she is in the middle of explaining something.