



A JO[♥]SR GUIDE TO

EAT DIRT

BY JOSH AXE

Why Leaky Gut May Be the Root Cause of Your Health Problems and 5 Surprising Steps to Cure It

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What's it about?

Are you experiencing stomach cramps or feeling constantly fatigued? Do you suffer from allergies or food intolerances? Have you repeatedly sought treatment for digestive or autoimmune conditions but failed to find relief? If any of this sounds familiar, it could simply be that you are suffering from what is one of the most common digestive disorders around—it's just that, unfortunately, it also happens to be one that is generally unrecognized.

Your digestive complaints could be the result of leaky gut—a health condition in which the lining of the intestines has become too permeable, allowing unwanted substances to pass from the digestive system into other areas of the body. This leaves you vulnerable to inflammation and a variety of illnesses, from eczema to arthritis. It is now believed that leaky gut is one of the most significant causes of disease and illness, and in the United States it has become a widespread epidemic.

Eat Dirt illuminates the five major causes of leaky gut and the precise reasons for its rapid spread across the United States. These reasons include our difficult-to-digest diet, the daily stresses of the twenty-first-century lifestyle, and the modern-day attitude to medicine. Armed with this knowledge, you will begin to understand the changes you must make to begin to heal your gut, resolve your health issues, and protect yourself from further illness. One thing is made clear throughout: to clean up your health, you have to first get dirty.

Bacterial imbalance in the digestive system can lead to leaky gut

Leaky gut is a health condition also known as increased intestinal permeability. It is relatively common and experienced by most of us at one time or another, but can have serious repercussions if it becomes chronic and goes untreated, with symptoms ranging from digestive discomfort to headaches, depression, and autoimmune disease. The condition has also been linked to many severe conditions, including Parkinson's, and even to autism.

The linings of our intestines are permeable, allowing essential nourishment from food to be transferred from the digestive system to other organs and body parts. This is a natural and healthy function. When we ingest too many negative microbes—also known as pathogens—the gut becomes overwhelmed and can no longer distinguish between good and bad microbes, which is how unwanted substances find their way into the blood when they should be flushed away.

Those pathogens then overtake the good bacteria in our gut, replace beneficial probiotics, and burrow holes in the linings of the intestines, allowing toxins, destructive organisms, and even particles of undigested food to leak into the bloodstream. This is called “leaky gut.”

Ideally, the gut should maintain a balance of 85 percent neutral and/or beneficial microbes and 15 percent pathogens to enable our immune system to create and maintain defenses against viruses. This balance, and a variety of microorganisms, is essential for a healthy gut. However, when someone suffers from chronic leaky gut, the balance is destroyed. As more and more pathogens slip through into the bloodstream, the immune system finds it harder to produce the antibodies needed to swiftly neutralize them. Instead, the liver becomes overworked, and so the pathogens begin to settle in the tissues they pass by.

This results in the inflammation of various organs and body parts, putting even more strain on the immune system which is still trying to defend the body. Eventually, it ends up attacking

anything it can in an attempt to repair itself, including nutrients and beneficial microbes. And if the problem goes untreated, it can develop into an autoimmune condition. In fact, studies have found leaky gut links to an array of conditions such as lupus, MS, diabetes, Parkinson's disease, ALS, and many more.

Leaky gut occurs when pathogens outnumber the neutral and beneficial microbes in the digestive system, allowing harmful bacteria to reach other areas of the body. In chronic cases, it causes the body to attack itself—triggering an autoimmune disease. So why has this condition become so prevalent?

Our modern-day diet is difficult for our body to digest

Today's standard American diet contains an overwhelming amount of processed food. This tends to be full of additives, emulsifiers (food stabilizers), added salt and sugar, and gluten, all of which contribute to leaky gut. Put simply, we are flooding our guts with substances that disrupt the beneficial microbes responsible for digesting food.

So what foods should we be avoiding, and what should we be eating instead?

Pasteurized cow's-milk products, which are consumed daily in most households, particularly by children, disrupt digestion by killing off digestive-supporting enzymes. Replace these with foods rich in probiotics, which support digestive enzymes and help maintain beneficial bacteria. Try dairy products made from goat's or sheep's milk, such as raw, fermented kefir and yogurt, and include more fermented vegetables in your diet, like kimchi and sauerkraut—these foods are all packed full of probiotics.

Wheat, another staple of American households, contains gluten, a protein we lack the enzymes to properly digest. In trying to break down gluten, the immune system damages the walls of the intestine, exacerbating leaky-gut conditions. Replacing wheat flour and wheat products with coconut or almond flour will ease the stress on your digestive system. Coconut flour in particular is an excellent substitute, being rich in protein, fiber, and good fats.

Almost all vegetable oils, frequently used for cooking, contain hydrogenated oils, which increase inflammation in the body, heighten cholesterol levels, and contain trans fats. Numerous studies have linked trans fats to an overwhelmingly long list of health issues including cancer, learning disabilities, and diabetes. These vegetable oils should be replaced with coconut oil or ghee (clarified butter) to improve digestion and support metabolism.

In addition to this, avoiding processed foods will be of huge benefit to your digestive system, as almost every processed food contains added sugar, including ketchup, bread, and even

salad dressings. Keep this in mind when adding sugar to your drinks, too. Nowadays the refined, crystallized sugar we're familiar with is widely acknowledged as a toxin, and has no nutritional benefit. Raw honey, a traditional sweetener, should be used wherever possible as a sugar alternative. Honey contains huge amounts of essential minerals and acts as a prebiotic, supporting good gut bacteria. Eating honey also means you are ingesting bee pollen, which helps ease the symptoms of allergies.

Staples of the modern Western diet, such as bread, cow's milk, and vegetable oil, are actually harmful for our gut. We should avoid all processed foods, and replace wheat with gluten-free products; cow's milk with raw, fermented goat or sheep milk; and vegetable oil with coconut oil, to improve our digestive health.

Overuse of chemical cleaners and antibacterial products is weakening our immune system

Perhaps a surprising contributing factor to the imbalance of bacteria in our guts is the oversanitization of society.

Nowadays, we miss no opportunity to kill off bacteria with antibacterial hand and body wash, kitchen cleaners, and bleach. But by eradicating germs completely from our life, our immune system loses the opportunity to create defenses and strengthen itself. This loss of exposure leads to allergies, food intolerances, and a generally weakened immune system, resulting in leaky gut and a susceptibility to all kinds of diseases.

You can counteract the effect of this by reintroducing dirt into your daily life and routine, while still staying “clean” enough to prevent catching colds. A technique named microexposure is recommended, which means exposing your gut regularly to tiny amounts of bacteria. Once ingested into your gut, the bacteria will encourage your immune system to build up resistance to that particular strain.

One simple daily form of microexposure is to eat local and organic foods, with dirt still clinging to the roots of fresh produce. These foods contain microbes from the earth local to your area, so ingesting them will train your immune system to react well to the pathogens and soil-based organisms (SBOs) it is most likely to come into immediate contact with. Before the industrial revolution, the majority of people lived in the countryside and had daily contact with SBOs. In our urbanized environment, we need to actively seek this contact with the earth to support our immune system and gut. Walk around barefoot outside and swim in oceans and lakes; perform any activity where your skin touches the earth and water outdoors to benefit from microbes in nature.

You can also do your body a favor by literally eating dirt. In parts of Africa, pregnant women actually eat clay, the most nutrient-rich kind of soil. If eating soil is a bit too gritty for your taste, try gargling with bentonite clay twice a day. The microbes in bentonite clay bind themselves to toxins and help to flush them out of the body.

Hand sanitizers, chemical cleaners, and other chemical-based products designed to destroy bad bacteria and keep us clean actually deprive our immune system of the chance to build up immunity to various strains of bacteria. Counter this by regularly exposing yourself to dirt and bacteria. This will help the immune system to maintain its defenses and keep your gut microbes in balance.

Modern farming practices are lowering the nutrient content of food

Advances in technology and the use of industrial chemicals mean that we are exposed to far more toxins in the present day than our ancestors were a century ago. Ingesting these undoubtedly contributes to our microbial imbalance. In addition, the food that we consume nowadays is relatively nutrient-poor.

In 1999, research was conducted by the US Department of Agriculture, the results of which detailed “reliable declines” in nutrient levels in over 40 fruits and vegetables. Our generation would have to consume eight oranges to obtain the equivalent in vitamin C of one orange of our grandparents’ generation. This is a result of decreasing soil health caused by over-farming. The earth is no longer being given time to replenish itself, and the farming industry focuses instead on rapid, pesticide-assisted production to meet growing demand.

The chemicals that are widely used in present-day farming are damaging our gut to an untold extent. Pesticides, fungicides, and herbicides are commonly used on crops to protect them from pests, but they leave a residue that is detrimental to the digestive system and the liver, overloading them with toxins. Similarly, genetically modified crops, which were originally grown to be resistant to weed killers, are flooding our gut with still more chemicals. Studies show that one especially potent ingredient in these strains of crops is glyphosate, which is directly linked to an increase in celiac disease. There are thousands of other chemicals being used in this manner that have yet to be studied.

Healthy soil supplies biological antibiotics, amino acids, and vitamins, a deficiency of which is linked to some severe chronic illnesses, including diabetes, dementia, and, of course, leaky gut. Unfortunately it has been shown that 80 percent of the food Americans consume is likely from crops sprayed with pesticides and grown in nutrient-deficient soil.

Counteract this by buying locally grown, organic produce from farmers markets or quality supermarkets. This food will

be chemical-free and will not have traveled far to reach your plate. For cheaper alternatives, try planting your own vegetable patch, or joining in with a community garden scheme, and always eat seasonal produce.

The practices that humans have developed to further the farming industry have been detrimental to our gut health. As a result of over-farming in nutrient-poor soil and mass-produced food sprayed with chemicals, we are eating low-quality foods and ingesting toxic chemicals daily. Protect your gut by eating seasonal, local, and organic produce.

The stress of modern-day life means our gut is being neglected

Mental and emotional stress has a more potent effect on our physical health than many people first realize. Shockingly, in one study it was revealed that over three-quarters of all doctor visits are for sicknesses related to stress. Poor mental well-being can also worsen any existing health conditions.

The mind is in constant communication with microbes in the digestive system via a biochemical signaling system called the gut-brain-microbiota axis. This relationship between the brain and the gut is reciprocal: stress levels directly affect microbial balance, and vice versa. Because the gut produces 90 percent of the body's mood-regulating chemical serotonin, if you are lacking in beneficial microbes this means fewer positive thoughts and, consequently, higher stress levels. And, the larger the quantity of stress hormones you produce, the more likely you are to experience gut inflammation and stomach lining irritation, which leads to an even higher number of pathogens and triggers leaky gut, thus causing a repetitive cycle of damage.

The problem is that most of us experience stress on a daily basis. The stress hormones—adrenaline and cortisol—are released into the body when we feel threatened. One of our body's physical responses to stress is the temporary suspension of all digestive and immune functions to conserve energy. In a genuine crisis, your body will channel this extra energy into fighting or fleeing, but nowadays our bodies have adapted to feel this stress more easily. Working to deadlines, running late to meet friends, or being stuck in traffic—our bodies are constantly producing stress hormones, but not being allowed the time or opportunity to dispel these hormones and calm down.

We must learn to manage stress in order to restore both mental health and gut health. Reducing stress rebalances the microbiome, which in turn heals inflammation, further aiding reduction of stress and anxiety. Use lavender oil for healing baths, and exercise regularly to release tension. Take time to unwind and, although this not possible for everyone, do try to

decrease your workload. Taking a supplement of ashwagandha—a herb often used in Indian traditional medicine, which lowers cortisol and balances the thyroid—has been shown to help relieve stress, and other herbs such as ginseng, rhodiola, and holy basil can also be beneficial.

Mind and gut are closely connected, and the stress of modern-day life is a key contributor to leaky gut. By taking time to exercise, unwind, and de-stress your mind, you will promote happy thoughts and happy bacteria.

Overuse of synthetic drugs is damaging our gut lining; natural remedies are a far safer solution

Our modern attitude to medicine is perhaps the most harmful of all the main contributors to the leaky gut epidemic. Certain medications require specific nutrients in order to work effectively, which means that most synthetic drugs actually deplete essential nutrients and minerals in the digestive system.

One of the best examples of this involves the overprescription of antibiotics. Antibiotics destroy beneficial microbes, deplete B vitamins, and cause damage to the intestines, stomach, and liver—and each dosage builds up a resistance to the medication itself, inhibiting treatment of future conditions. Frequent use is extremely harmful for the gut, yet across the globe, consumption of antibiotics increased by a massive 35 percent between the years 2000 and 2010.

Other prescription drugs cause an imbalance in stomach acid by disrupting the enzymes that convert nutrients into substances your body needs, and even over-the-counter pain medication blocks digestive enzymes, causing discomfort and pain. Taken frequently, they also become ineffective, creating more problems than they solve: a study from Denmark showed that long-term pain-medication users were more likely to experience more severe pain in the long run, have a lower quality of life, and ironically end up spending even more money on healthcare.

It is clear that the use of synthetic drugs is seriously damaging to the body. In fact, on average there are 106,000 deaths a year in the United States alone from adverse side effects of medication. Synthetic medication should be used only when absolutely necessary, and definitely not prescribed to alleviate sickness such as cold or flu. Instead, try natural solutions such as traditional herbs and probiotics—these are risk-free and just as effective in providing relief.

Probiotics act medicinally by replenishing our beneficial bacteria, which support the liver, kidneys, and bowels in all their functions, while protecting the digestive tract. They

provide vital nutrients, minerals, and enzymes. Supplements of probiotics can either be used to wholly replace pharmaceuticals, or to protect our digestive systems from the damage inflicted by synthetic drugs. They especially support those suffering from low vitamin levels, respiratory infections, mental health issues, poor cognitive function, weight-gain issues, and leaky gut.

Prescription medications deplete your gut of nutrients and at the same time irritate or worsen existing conditions. Natural solutions such as probiotic supplements support the gut, as well as alleviating many of the symptoms that antibiotics are often prescribed to treat.

You can heal your digestive system in five simple steps

It's easy to get swept up by modern-day life and ignore how post-industrial society distances us from our traditional, natural lifestyles. However, you can begin to counter this by minimizing ingestion of chemicals and maximizing opportunities for consumption of nutrients and exposure to various bacteria. Follow the steps outlined below for optimum health—in your gut, and in your entire body.

1. **Remove:** First, remove all nutrient-poor, gut-damaging foods from your diet. The best way to do this is to simply remove all products containing wheat, cow's milk, sugar, trans fats, and pesticides from your kitchen. This way, you will avoid temptation.
2. **Reseed:** Now that you have cut out those difficult-to-digest foods, your digestive system will be experiencing a reprieve. Take advantage of this by using the next stage to help expose your gut to a wide variety of bacteria to help replenish microbes. Take SBO supplements, walk outside barefoot, do some gardening, and swim in the ocean.
3. **Restore:** Now is the time to replenish the nutrients your gut has been craving. Eat raw dairy products made from sheep and goat milk, fermented vegetables like sauerkraut, fresh produce from local farmers markets, and a wide array of coconut products such as flour, milk, and oil.
4. **Release:** Turn your focus on relieving tension from your life. Get active by exercising more, ideally daily and in nature. Drink calming beverages such as chamomile tea, and take lavender baths. Have a relaxing massage, read an uplifting book, practice yoga: whatever helps you unwind.
5. **Reseal:** heal your digestive system once and for all and prevent relapses by adjusting your attitude to health. Focus on preventative techniques, such as taking probiotics and using essential oils, rather than unnecessary, reactive practices such as synthetic drugs and medication.

Keep to these five steps for a week or two, and track your progress in a journal to really notice improvements in mood, health, and overall happiness. By focusing on freeing your food, cleaning products, and daily routine of chemicals, you can detoxify your life and get back to nature.

Final summary

The modern Western lifestyle is causing a hidden epidemic of illness and discomfort related to the same digestive condition: leaky gut. This begins with the types of foods that have become staples of the modern diet—wheat or dairy based, with added salt, sugar, and emulsifiers—which do not contain sufficient nutrients that our bodies need to survive and are also difficult to digest, overburdening our digestive systems.

In addition, the obsession that we have developed over the last 50 years or so to maintain germfree households and workplaces has led to us ingesting thousands of chemicals daily, and we are robbing our immune system of the chance to develop its own immunity, causing it to weaken. Moreover, the modern-day practice of over-farming and pesticide use, which depletes the earth of essential vitamins and minerals, means that most produce is covered in chemicals and grown in soil that is significantly lacking in nutrients.

The trials and speed of modern life are causing us to feel stress and anxiety much more acutely than our ancestors. Our bodies tend to experience a stress reaction daily, resulting in limited digestive and autoimmune function. Unfortunately, if we go to the doctor, we are likely to be given prescription medication, which robs our gut of the nutrients and beneficial bacteria that it needs to thrive. Antibiotics, while killing off the detrimental bacteria that cause us to feel ill, also attack the good microbes that protect us from harm and aid food digestion.

Chemical-ridden foods and homes, a high-anxiety lifestyle, and toxic medicine—it's modern life that is poisoning our bodies and has turned leaky gut into an epidemic. Luckily, there's a solution. We can counteract these factors by only eating enzyme-supporting, easy-to-digest foods, grown organically in nutrient-rich soil; avoiding stress and synthetic drugs wherever possible; and allowing ourselves microexposures to dirt and bacteria, little and often. Leading a dirtier, chemical-free lifestyle is the fastest way to treat leaky gut—and prevent it from returning—once and for all.

Now read the book

Inspired by his own mother's illness, and the lifestyle plan he developed to treat her ailments and eventually cure them, *Eat Dirt* is Dr. Josh Axe's guide to getting back to nature and detoxifying your life. Bursting with recipes for homemade eating plans, cleaning fluids, and grooming products, this is more than just a cookbook; it is a guide to healthy, "dirty" living. Promoting natural well-being at every opportunity, Dr. Axe's plan is gentle on the gut, aiming to replenish goodness that has been lost, heal existing health conditions, and protect the digestive and immune systems from future damage.

Discover the secrets of ancient grains, traditional medicine, and natural remedies with *Eat Dirt's* extensive guide to the beneficial properties of foods, herbs, and essential oils; learn about the direct connection between leaky gut and many types of health issues relating to skin, digestion, and autoimmune functions; and for even more tailored dietary and lifestyle advice, answer the in-depth leaky gut quiz to reveal which of the five strains of increased gut permeability you are suffering from.

To inspire and encourage the reader, Dr. Axe shares real-life success stories from patients of all ages, suffering from a range of different ailments, including autism and cancer. Follow their incredible stories of recovery, and discover how the Eat Dirt Program can drastically improve your quality of life, too.

Key takeaways

- Leaky gut is an incredibly common but frequently undiagnosed digestive disorder that can lead to further health conditions and exacerbate existing illnesses.
- Modern medicine can have detrimental effects on our digestive and immune systems and should be replaced with natural remedies wherever possible.
- Exposing yourself to dirt and bacteria little and often helps your body to create and maintain immune defenses.
- Avoiding wheat and dairy, as well as minimizing stress, benefits the microbes in your gut.

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