

Top Tips for Good Gut Health

Before we start getting into the food tips, let's talk about some basic lifestyle changes. It's a good idea to begin with lifestyle changes, as you will have more time, energy, and peace in your life, and this will allow you to focus on healing. The idea isn't to be perfect here - even making small changes in a few of these areas will go a long way towards helping you stay on track with your healing journey.

Lifestyle Tips:

1. Simplify your life.

Most of us have lives that are far too busy. We are under immense vocational and financial pressures. Add to that friends, family, school and after school commitments - no wonder we feel stretched so thin. During our healing journey, we found it was best to reset our expectations of what we needed to achieve during the period of recovery. For some of you, it may mean cutting down on work days, or not trying to make this year the most financially lucrative. It may mean that having kids involved in many after school activities isn't the best idea at this time. You cannot prioritise everything, and when health is a priority, something, and perhaps many things, have got to give. Find areas in your life where, at least for the period where you are focusing on recovery, you can cut down or eliminate areas of unnecessary stress. This also means that you may have to re-examine your expectations in life. Health and a more peaceful way of living may need to become your top priority.

Listen in to a podcast where we talk about ways to simplify your life: [Simplifying, with Fouad Kassab](#)

2. Detox the home.

Cleaning up your diet is comparatively more difficult than cleaning up your home. So it makes sense to make these easy changes first. They are simple, and once the habits are set, you don't need to think about it much, and so it won't require any additional energy from you while you're healing. Supermarket bought body products such as deodorants, perfumes, shampoos, conditioners, body lotions, dishwashing liquids, etc, are loaded with unnatural chemicals that place a chronic toxic load on the body. Removing these toxins from the home by using natural alternatives is as simple as switching brands.

*A great resource for detoxing the home is [Low Tox Life](#). Listen in to a podcast with Jo and Alexx here: [Organic & Low Tox Living](#). Find our favourite non-toxic body products here: [Weleda](#) - use our coupon code **quirkyjourney** to get 10% off your order, and get free postage if your order is over \$90.*

3. Declutter your home.

Areas of clutter around the home, the office or even the car place subconscious stress on the mind. One of the main aims you have during your healing journey is to reduce stress. Getting rid of clutter, donating or if not possible, throwing out things that you no longer need is such a powerful way to energise your life. We've found that simply by cleaning up or decluttering our work area before we start work, our energy is higher, our focus is improved and our mood is happier.

The [Konmari method](#) for decluttering is amazingly effective.

4. Spend more time outdoors.

Zoo animals that are not accessing their natural habitat are, in ways similar to us, plagued with chronic illnesses that they do not suffer in the wild. Similarly, the human body is happiest when it is as close to nature as possible. This means fresh air, bare feet, sunshine, breathing in the essential oils from the trees, getting in contact with dirt. Outdoor time strengthens the immune system, improves mood, reduces stress and that's just the beginning. The outdoors also provide a great opportunity for getting in contact with your peaceful state, which gives you a lot of perspective on life and this in turn makes facing life's challenges or making hard decisions easier.

Try [Forest Bathing](#) for a beautifully healing way to spend time outdoors.

5. Inform your family.

Quite often, we find the most pushback for change comes from the people closest to us - our family. It's easy to understand. Human beings are creatures of comfort and habit. Take away their pasta, and you may very well see their ugly side... Tantrums, incessant crying, alienation, grumpiness and sour behaviour are all common, and that's just usually the partner. But seriously now, we're not saying this issue is going to be completely solved by talking to your family about why you're making changes. At least, however, you could have a better outcome and far less resistance when your family knows the importance of these changes, and that you are doing it for everyone's benefit.

Help the family understand the importance of a healthy diet by watching relevant documentaries together such as **The Magic Pill** or **That Sugar Film**.

6. Water quality.

Did you know that humans are composed of approximately 65% water? This cannot be emphasised more: the quality of the water we put into our bodies is just as important as the quality of the food we eat. Up until recently in our human history, most sources of water would have been ok for us to drink, however we are now living in a time where high quality water can be hard to come by. Tap water, bottled water, filtered water, well water, spring water, river water, rainwater... so many options. We know that the best kind of food we can eat is that which grows in or comes from nature, and the same can be said about water. Drinking water from our natural environment, directly from an unpolluted source, is what we humans did historically, and still remains the best option for health. Tap water contains, among other added chemicals, chlorine, which is used as an antimicrobial agent. This stops the water from having a microbial overgrowth. However, when chlorine is ingested or comes in contact with our skin, it is damaging to our own bacteria which we need to be healthy. If we are unable to access pure, wild, uncontaminated water, then we need to do our best by filtering tap water that we use for showers and drinking.

Learn all about the best options for water filters in our podcast: [All Your Water Filter Questions Answered!](#) We love and use zazen benchtop filters and shower filters. If you're interested, visit [their website](#) and enter the coupon code QCWATER15 to receive 10% off your order.

7. Choose your people carefully

They say, if you want to walk fast, walk alone, but if you want to walk far, walk together. This is true when those around you create a support network that helps propel you forward. Like-minded people who are on their own health journey provide an incredible amount of support, experience and wisdom. Online communities such as our Quirky Cooking for Gut Health Program Support Group (you are provided access to this group when you join the program) are incredibly valuable providing much needed encouragement. There is nothing like being on a team of people invested in their own personal health.

However, people you have in your life may also be exerting a negative effect on your wellbeing. Watch out for and create careful boundaries with those who tend to be negative all the time, requiring you to give constant energy; or those who are overly dramatic, critical, complainers, argumentative, demanding, and those unable to accept responsibility in their lives. Take stock of your people and make sure you know where you stand in relation to them. If you are highly empathetic and tend to absorb other people's energy, learn how to sympathise instead. This means you can still provide support without having your own life negatively affected. If you have accumulated habits that make you require energy from others, now is a good chance to review these habits and start working on finding your own inner strength, which you will need for your healing journey.

8. Prioritise sleep.

Most of the hard work we do for healing starts paying off when we sleep. Sleep, from naps to deep restorative nighttime sleep, is crucial. It's the time when the body focuses its energies on healing, and so, the more you can optimise your sleep, the better you heal. It is quite common in a culture that is all "go go go" to feel like sleep is somehow a form of laziness or unproductivity. This couldn't be further from the truth, as good sleep improves day-time activities, enhances mood and promotes healing. Take it from us, never feel guilty about resting when you need to; be gentle with yourself at every step of the way and "rest rest rest".

Listen to this podcast about being gentle with yourself, and having a balanced approach to healing which includes plenty of rest: [Layers of Healing, with Elyse Comerford](#). Also listen to: [Sleep Nutrition Part 1](#) and [Part 2](#) with Lucy Lichtenstein.

9. Foster more inner peace in your life.

We've found that, quite often, the need for healing is paired with the need for inner peace, since after all, the body and the mind are not separate. It is usual for human beings to have an inner voice that is overly critical, analytical, judgmental, fearful, anxious and/or obsessive. Negative self talk is a real phenomenon. It's important to see if the language we use to talk to ourselves is negative. Externalised, your inner language could sound so violent that you wouldn't tolerate anyone who spoke to you in that way. Coming to know your own inner language, and softening the voice so that it is kind, supportive, loving and nurturing, is of extreme importance. Use whatever tools that work, from therapy to prayer and meditation. Practice settling into a more peaceful mindset, and work to make it your home.

10. Have a success mindset.

Believe in your ability to heal. If we have learned anything from placebo-based studies is that quite often, the placebo is more effective at producing results than whatever medication is being tested. That's the power of belief right there. Remember that the aim is to see yourself succeed in the long term. Don't beat yourself up for little hiccups along the way, just learn to fail fast and recover fast, accepting that mistakes will be made along the way. Stay positive with yourself, and don't measure your success simply by how much you've improved and how far you are from your goal. Illness is a slippery slope and even if your symptoms simply remain as they are over a long period of time, that's an achievement! Remember, it would have been much worse if you left yourself unattended. Be grateful for all that you accomplish.

Food Tips:

1. Begin by focusing on 'adding in' not 'taking out'.

Changing your diet can be overwhelming at first, so before you start taking foods away, work on increasing the healing foods in your weekly menu first. As you add more and more nourishing foods, you'll naturally crowd out the less nourishing foods. This will take away the stress of trying to 'do it all at once'! Remember, every little change towards a better diet is a step forward, no matter how small.

2. Meat Stocks & Broths.

Broth is now appearing on the menu in cafes around the country, which is wonderful news as it is one of the most gut healing foods around. Bones from grass-fed cows or lamb, free range chicken or wild caught fish make a highly nutritious broth that contains gelatine, a compound with numerous health benefits. Specifically for the gut, gelatine increases gastric acid secretion for improved digestion, and restores a healthy mucosal stomach lining, which seals the gut for decreased permeability.

For those beginning GAPS Intro to heal the gut, you will need to begin with meat stocks and move on to bone broths later, as meat stocks are gentler on a damaged gut, and an important first step. Meat stocks are made with joint bones, meat close to the bone, with lots of connective tissue, and gelatinous meats – not the muscle meats. Connective tissue contains the really gelatinous proteins that the body uses as basic building blocks to heal damaged cells and gut lining. A good example of some delicious meat stock recipes are things like good, [old-fashioned chicken soup](#) made with meat on the bone, [Osso Bucco](#), or a lamb shank casserole. These are delicious, nourishing, healing foods the family will love!

See some tips for making broths and stocks here: [Bone Broths & Meat Stocks](#) and in our cookbook, [Life-Changing Food](#).

2. Probiotic Foods.

When the beneficial bacteria in your gut are disrupted (this could be due to refined foods, pesticides, environmental toxins, stress, antibiotics, medications, etc), the pathogenic bacteria get out of control, causing an imbalance in your microbiome. Repopulating your gut with beneficial bacteria from a variety of probiotic sources is of vital importance for healing!

Fermented vegetables contain billions of good bacteria with many more varieties than a commercially produced probiotic supplement. If you feel it's simpler to begin with a good supplement, check with your practitioner as to which one to start with, but just be aware that you'll get more varieties of beneficial bacteria by eating a wide variety of traditionally fermented foods than by taking any supplement on the market.

To begin fermented foods if you're not used to them, start with 1 tsp of sauerkraut juice per day and slowly build up to 3 tsp a day. Then start adding in the sauerkraut until you're having a tablespoon with each meal. (It's important to start slowly as fermented foods cause die-off of pathogenic bacteria, which can make you feel awful if you go too quickly.) Once you're coping well with sauerkraut, you can begin to add in other fermented foods. Fermented drinks like kefir and kombucha, 24 hour sour cream and yoghurt, fermented dairy free 'cheeses', fermented fruits/juices, sauces and vegetables (eg. kimchi, salsa, pickles, dilly carrots).

Listen to an amazing podcast with Dr Jason Hawrelak to better understand the benefits of probiotic foods: [Meet Your Microbiome, with Dr Jason Hawrelak](#). These ebooks have plenty of fermented food recipes: [Digestive Hope Ebooks](#). You'll also find recipes for Sauerkraut, Fermented Salsa, Fermented Cashew Cheese, and Fermented Chilli Oil in our [Life-Changing Food cookbook](#).

3. Good Fats.

Good fats are an important part of a healthy diet – they supply long lasting energy, help you to absorb the vitamins in your veggies, help your brain and gut to work properly, and keep you satiated so you don't have the urge to snack between meals. Don't be scared to include healthy fats in your diet. These should be the traditional, unrefined fats and organic if possible. Choose cold-pressed oils like olive oil, macadamia oil, avocado oil and coconut oil; start increasing your intake of grass fed/organic animal fats like tallow, duck/chicken fat, lard, butter and ghee; and fatty foods like egg yolks, avocados, nuts, coconut milk, coconut, and full fat fermented dairy products (like yoghurt and cultured cream), avoiding anything you are sensitive or allergic to, of course. Ban industrialised oils like vegetable oils, canola oil, grapeseed oil, refined sunflower oil, rice bran oil... oils that you need a factory and laboratory to make! These oils are not recognised by our cells as food - they oxidise (rust) the cells and are not recommended for good health.

For a balanced view of fats and oils, read this article: [Which Oils, When?](#) Also, listen to our podcast, [Good Oils, Bad Oils](#)

4. Eat Less Sweets.

Pathogenic bacteria LOVE sugar! Get rid of refined sweeteners like sugar, corn syrup, and chemical sweeteners, and try to limit even the natural sweeteners (eg. honey, dates) to about 15% of your calorie intake at the most. Pair sugars with fats and protein to slow down their release into the bloodstream. Aim for no more than two serves of fruit a day (including in smoothies), the occasional baked sweet (eg. made with almond meal/coconut flour, honey, eggs, plenty of good fats/coconut cream), minimal sweetener in tea/coffee (preferably honey), and drink water instead of juice. Honey is pre-digested and easy on the gut, so it's a good alternative to white sugar, but keep it to a minimum.

Check out [this newsletter](#) for some healthy, sugar free snack ideas!

5. Reduce Starches.

Starches feed gut bacteria, which is great when the starches are unrefined (from a variety of root vegetables, fruits and legumes), and your gut bacteria are balanced and thriving! Whole food starches act as prebiotics in the gut, feeding the beneficial bacteria. But when your gut is struggling with an overgrowth of bad bacteria, starches you eat will help to feed the those as well, and they will continue to thrive. And if you're eating refined starches, they will also create an environment in the gut that pathogenic bacteria and parasites thrive in. This is why starchy foods should be greatly reduced in the early stages of gut healing. Afterwards healthy, wholefood starches can be brought back in when there's more of a balance in the microbiome.

Begin to swap out high-starch foods with nutrient dense, low-starch foods. Here's some ideas for swaps:

- cauliflower 'rice' instead of rice
- cauliflower mash instead of mashed potato
- veggie 'noodles' (zucchini/carrot/cabbage in thin strips) or mung bean vermicelli ('bean thread' noodles) instead of pasta
- nut and seed (paleo/GAPS/keto) breads instead of wheat bread and starchy gluten free breads
- almond or pepita meal pastry instead of grain pastry
- roasted pumpkin cubes instead of potato chips/wedges
- GAPS Wraps instead of grain wraps
- work on having lots of extra (non-starchy) veggies to bulk out meals instead of rice, pasta, breads and potato

Try our [Cauliflower-Leek Mash](#) & [Grain Free Breads](#); and there's plenty more recipes in our [Life-Changing Food cookbook](#).

6. Reduce Dairy.

Dairy is difficult to digest for a damaged gut. Reduce the amount of dairy you eat (especially homogenised milk, cheese, cream cheese, and sweet yoghurts), and swap over to forms of dairy that are easier to digest, in moderation (eg. organic non-homogenised milk, 24 hour yoghurt and sour cream, milk kefir, ghee, and butter). If you are ready to take it a step further, go without dairy for at least two weeks - this will give you a good idea of whether you are reacting to dairy or not. It's also best to treat dairy as a condiment, not a main food group. Don't forget that milk has sugars too (lactose), and you're trying to reduce the sugars!

We have lots of ideas here for [Dairy Substitutes](#), and plenty more in our [Life-Changing Food cookbook](#).

7. Begin adding in Full GAPS recipes.

We recommend you begin adding some Full GAPS recipes to the weekly meals, and work up to eating only GAPS meals before beginning Intro (unless your diet is so limited already and your practitioner has said you need to just begin at Intro). You can check out the list of foods allowed on the GAPS diet [here](#) - if you're eating the 'full GAPS diet' that means you can eat any of the foods on this list (all stages) - or whichever of these foods you can tolerate.

If you have our cookbook, [Life-Changing Food](#), this will help tremendously for beginning to cook this way. Most of the recipes are suitable for the Full GAPS diet, or have GAPS variations. If you

don't have the book, you can order it [here](#). You'll also find plenty of GAPS recipes on [the blog](#), and elsewhere online.

8. Start working on lunchbox changes.

Our online program includes lunchbox ideas, however it does take a bit of a change in thinking. You'll need to buy thermoses for lunches away from home (for adults going to work or kids going to school), as GAPS Intro meals mostly consist of soups, stews, meat, and cooked veggies at first. To begin transitioning to GAPS lunchboxes, start sending some of their favourite meals in a thermos (maybe a couple of times a week at first) - things you know they will LOVE! If you can hold off on doing GAPS Intro until school holidays you'll find it much simpler, as hopefully, they will be past the most difficult stages in a couple of weeks, and will be able to move onto some non-thermos meals (things like boiled eggs, avocado, pumpkin pancakes). Then before long they should be able to move on to foods like GAPS wraps, almond meal muffins, grain free breads and salads/raw veggie sticks, which make lunchboxes a lot easier!

Here are some great ideas for [GAPS lunchbox fillers](#)! You can find more in our [Life-Changing Food cookbook](#), on the page titled Lunches & Snacks.

9. Buy in bulk.

This way of eating can get expensive, because you are buying good quality (organic where possible) meat, fish, eggs, veggies, nuts and seeds. You need to change your mindset from 'eating as cheaply as possible' to 'eating nutrient dense food for healing' - and that sometimes means cutting down on the spending in other areas for a while (eg. expensive holidays, cafes and restaurants, entertainment). But it is so worth making the sacrifice for the good of your health!

One way to make things easier on the bank account is to buy in bulk as much as possible. Little packets of nuts and seeds from the supermarket will end up costing you a lot, and if you try to buy organic meat in small amounts, you'll pay so much per kilo it will be very hard for most families to afford. Here's some tips for bulk buying that will save you money:

- Get a big freezer so you can buy in bulk. Gumtree or local Buy/Swap/Sell pages often have great deals on second-hand freezers, so check there before buying brand new.
- Find local farmers that raise grass-fed/pastured, pesticide-free/organic meat/chickens and ask for bulk prices. Get some friends together and order in bulk, then split up the order between you.
- Find a seafood supplier that has wild-caught fish (frozen on the boats is best as the histamine levels will be lower than fish that has been sitting unfrozen for days); buy a bulk box of fish.
- Do the same with eggs, fruit, veggies, honey - whatever you can find locally that is good quality, organic/pesticide free, grass-fed, etc.
- If you have an organic, grass-fed dairy anywhere nearby, contact them about bulk cream/unhomoenised milk - you can freeze them to use for making 24 hr yoghurt and sour cream. Also get unsalted butter in bulk if possible for making ghee.
- Join a bulk buying co-op for dry ingredients (nuts, seeds, coconut, oils, etc) or ask your health food store for bulk prices. There are also plenty of online health food stores that will also give bulk prices when asked, so make an order with some friends and you'll save heaps.

See this article for some more tips, and recommendations of places to buy from: [Buying in Bulk](#).

10. Prepare ahead and cook in bulk.

Keeping up with all the homemade, nourishing meals that your family needs while healing can be a daunting prospect. But if you learn to cook in bulk and prepare ahead, it will really help to cut down on your time in the kitchen, and reduce your stress levels! Here are some simple tips for bulk cooking, and preparing ahead for meals:

- Meal plan! We have six complete meal plans (breakfast, lunch, dinner and snacks) in our program recipe ebooks, but at first you may want to begin with planning just one main meal for each day of the week. Buy the ingredients and have them in the fridge/freezer ready to go. Check your meal plan each afternoon and prepare for the next day as needed (eg. thawing out meat, making stock, making ghee), while cooking that night's meal. This will save you lots of frustration and last minute panics!! When you can manage it, add in planning for breakfasts and lunches, so that mornings are not such a rush. (See our [Life-Changing Food cookbook](#) for meal ideas, a list of breakfast ideas, and lunchbox ideas.)
- Whenever you cook anything that's freezable, try and cook a double or even a triple batch, and freeze some for another day.
- When you have a couple of hours to cook, prepare two or three meals at a time - eg. a slow-cooker roast, a pot of stew on the back burner, and have a chicken cooking in another pot for stock and meat. Add in some chopped veggies at the end of cooking time and you have an easy meal!
- When chopping veggies for dinner, chop extra - a couple of days' worth if you can - and store in reusable ziploc bags in the fridge. It doesn't take much longer to chop 6 carrots instead of 3, and you only have to clean up once.
- If you can, get a friend over to do a big cook-up with you once a week - this way you get to spend some time together and you can both take home a few meals for the week ahead. Another idea is to have a day where you make sauerkraut/ghee/tallow or other basics with friends, to save time in the week ahead.
- If you feel like you just can't keep up with all the food prep, think about hiring a young person to chop veggies, do dishes, and cook basic things for you a couple of times a week. Or if it's an option for your family, look into getting an au-pair for a few months. This is especially helpful for mums who work and need someone at home helping with kids and meals.

For plenty of help, tips and tricks for bulk cooking, listen to this podcast: [Bulk Cooking, Meal Planning & Freezer Meals](#); and join the Facebook group [Once a Term Cooking!](#)