

8 Ways to Support Your Gut for Healthy Aging

When you're over 50, you may focus on your new wrinkles, gray hair, and those extra pounds around your midsection. There are also many changes happening inside your body that deserve your attention.

Aging brings a natural decline in immune health and a gradual increase in inflammation. These result in a higher risk for age-related chronic diseases such as diabetes, high blood pressure, heart disease, and cognitive decline. As you enter your 60s, your gut microbiome, the collection of trillions of helpful bacteria and other microbes in your gastrointestinal tract, also begins to change and is more likely to lose richness and diversity.¹ These changes are associated with poor health outcomes.

The gut microbiome plays a crucial role in immune health and maintaining a healthy response to inflammation. Therefore, paying more attention to your gut health before you are older may help you stay healthier longer and enjoy a full and active life. These research-backed strategies can support the adult microbiome and promote longevity.

1. **Eat a plant-forward diet.** Fruits, vegetables, legumes, whole grains, nuts, and seeds are rich in fiber and prebiotic compounds that nourish and stimulate the growth and activity of beneficial gut bacteria. These foods also provide antioxidants that protect cells and DNA from damaging free radicals, further reducing the risk of age-related chronic diseases.²
2. **Reduce your intake of heavily processed foods and eat home-cooked meals.** Ultra-processed foods, such as frozen dinners, packaged snack foods, and fast foods, are high in ingredients that promote inflammation and are associated with microbiome disturbances. On the other hand, whole-food diet patterns, such as the Mediterranean diet, have been shown to improve health in older adults and promote positive changes to the gut microbiome.²
3. **Add more of these foods to your diet:** blueberries, elderberries, cherries, apples, broccoli, cocoa powder, black or green tea, nuts, olive oil, and spices, especially oregano, rosemary, and cloves. These are some of the top sources of polyphenols, antioxidants that support the microbiome and metabolic health (weight, blood pressure, and insulin function).³ A [polyphenol-rich dietary supplement](#) can provide extra insurance if you don't consistently eat these foods.
4. **Aim for seven to eight hours of sleep each night.** Quality sleep is crucial for immune, cognitive, and metabolic health, but sleep disruptions are common with aging. [Magnesium](#) or a quality [sleep-support supplement](#) may promote more restful sleep. Interestingly, research links a more rich, diverse gut microbiome with improved sleep quality. Thus, supporting your gut health might also help you get a better night's sleep.⁴
5. **Manage your stress.** Chronic stress takes a toll on all aspects of health. It weakens your immune system, raises cortisol and stress hormones, promotes insulin resistance, and is associated with unfavorable changes in gut health. For many people, ongoing stress is a root cause of chronic diseases. Strategies such as daily moderate exercise, yoga, meditation, journaling, and talk therapy are all helpful. Adaptogens like [Ashwagandha extract](#) can also support a healthy stress

response. It's essential to try various stress management techniques to find one that works for you.

6. **Keep moving.** Aim for at least 30 minutes of moderate exercise daily plus strength training two to three times each week. Exercise has significant benefits for your body, brain, and microbiome. Strength training exercises, in particular, are essential for middle-aged and older people because they help maintain muscle mass that naturally declines with age. Age-related muscle loss is associated with frailty and poor metabolic health in older adults.²
7. **Use medications only when necessary.** Many can cause unfavorable changes in gut bacteria. A healthy diet and lifestyle or other holistic interventions can often help manage chronic health conditions. These may be worth trying first or to complement a lower medication dose.
8. **Consider using a high-quality probiotic designed specifically for older adults.** It adds beneficial species and strains of bacteria to support the microbiome in those over 60, for extra gut and immune support.

References

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