

The Rebel Nutritionist Podcast Episode 21 - Gut Health, Your Questions Answered

MERYL: Hey everyone. This is your Rebel Nutritionist, and we are talking all things gut health today as a follow-up to our amazing podcast that we had last week with Dr. Marie Van der Merwe. And so I have Emily D'Acosta on today, who is part of our team here. And we're just going to do a little bit of a back and forth because we've gotten some amazing questions from all of our listeners.

And I feel that it's really important to follow up that podcast with this one, because there are still just so many questions, so many misconceptions. Because it's a confusing topic, right? We're trying to understand how gut health impacts everything in our system and can be pretty mind blowing.

So I have Emily here today. She is going to help me with the questions and we'll just do a little bit of a back and forth. And as always, we hope you enjoy it and then send in the questions as you have them. Cause we love, we love being able to answer and really clarify. For you guys. So without further ado, Emily, I'm going to let you start with the first question.

EMILY: Awesome. Thanks Meryl. So as you had said, the GI health and all that kind of stuff is really, really important and it can be really confusing. So I think the first question we could start with is kind of just piggybacking off the topic from last week. What exactly is the microbiome?

What exactly is the microbiome?

It was touched on briefly in the last episode. But maybe we can just reiterate and elaborate more on what that is and how it interacts with the body and why it's so important for all the systems of the body to be able to work in balance together.

MERYL: Absolutely. So that's a great question. What we now know is our microbiome, overall microbiome, is everything that is not human about us. And we are more bacteria, and different kinds of organisms than we even are human cells. **So the microbiome are all the bacteria, fungi, all those things that make up our system** and it's how does our own system interact with these very bacteria that keeps us in symbiosis that keeps us in optimal health.

So the gut microbiome are all those similar bacteria, sometimes the different bacteria in different parts of the system that we now know. So it's the bacteria. Both good and bad, and the protozoa and the different fungi and all of those compounds and components that make up our gut health and there's different bacteria in different parts of the GI system.

So when we say GI system, it's literally everything from your mouth to your anus and in between. And so there's what we do know is there's different bacteria that is in your mouth versus different bacteria in your small intestine versus different bacteria in your large intestine. And we know that we need to keep all of that bacteria happy in order for our health to be maintained and to piggyback onto that cause I know it was another question is **what is the importance of this bacteria** in terms of, well, if I have good bacteria, if I have bad bacteria, you need both, right. **We need the balance of both the good and the bad to maintain health.** And so recognizing that and paying attention to that in how we eat, in our lifestyle.

So really everything affects it, not just our food, but our sleeping patterns, our emotional thoughts, our exercise, our lifestyle habits, everything affects not just our gut microbiome. But our overall microbiome and the other piece to that is that people often say, well, I'm sure my gut microbiome is healthy because I have no GI problems.

Right. I have no reflux. I have no indigestion. I have no bloating. I have no discomfort. I poop every day on a daily basis. Right. So people think if they don't have issues with that, that their gut is healthy. And what I want to let you know is nothing could be farther from the truth. I have some of the most what seemingly healthy people walk in the door that, oh, their GI systems are fine, supposedly. And then we do some testing and there's really some significant imbalances that can potentially have health consequences. **So I think it's important to recognize that we are under the inclination that if I have no gut symptoms, that I am fine. And I think we have to be very clear that that is not always the case.**

EMILY: Awesome, that's very, very detailed. And I think a lot of people will have clarity from that answer. I really like how you said that the GI symptoms are not the only sign and telltale signal that there could be an imbalance in the body.

And piggybacking off of that you said you see a lot of people come in, who are in an imbalanced state. They might not know it from their symptoms, but we ended up finding that out through testing and other methods of digging deeper. So I think that goes well into the next question of trying to figure out.

What are leaky gut and SIBO and what are the differences between them?

What actual imbalances could be occurring in the GI system? The top two that I think a lot of **people hear most frequently are leaky gut and SIBO**. And we see a lot of clients that end up with this type of diagnosis. So we do have a question from the audience. Can you clarify what leaky gut and SIBO are?

And what the difference is between the two and how that relates back to the microbiome and the rest of the body.

Absolutely. So those are great questions. So leaky gut, let's start with that. It's been a term that's been around for years and years and years. And many, many, many years ago it really was dismissed by the medical community.

It's still often dismissed. Although I do think it's gaining more traction because of so much of the work that has been done in this area. But basically **leaky gut is also known as what we call intestinal permeability**. And what does that even mean? Well, it means that, and without having a picture to be able to describe it, Our cells in our intestines are meant to be held close together.

They are, they are linked, right. It's kind of like you're creating a brick wall. Think about a brick wall and you have cement in between those bricks and the cement is supposed to keep.

Whatever's on the outside, on the outside and not coming into the inside. Right. But what happens if that cement in between the bricks deteriorates and now we're getting outside air into the inside or we're getting toxins or whatever it is, right.

Coming into a space that it's not supposed to be, it's going to affect. That environment and the cells of our intestines are very much like that, the cells of the intestines are held together with certain kinds of cement. And there are things that break down that cement things like gluten, some people who are gluten sensitive, you don't even have to be celiac.

Right. But we know there is a substance in gluten called zonulin. That, when it is released, it indicates intestinal permeability. There's other things like toxins or molds or bacteria, even that can deteriorate that cement in between our cells lining. And **when that happens and things go through that space, it creates an immune response** and that immune response can be anything from a food allergy to bloating to brain fog, to even mental disorders, anxiety, depression has a huge link to the gut. And so we need to understand that intestinal permeability is a very real thing. We can measure it and it's something that we must pay attention to. And it's not always again, traditional symptoms. So a lot of times people will come in.

With brain fog with anxiety and it is actually linked to their gut health and not so much, let's say mental, emotional health. So **everything in the body becomes interconnected to the gut**, same thing with sleep with sleep and the immune function that's really, really important. And I think there was a question on that, but **our immune health starts in the gut**.

And so if the gut is impaired, our immune system will be impaired. And we don't always know it. And especially now with the rise in COVID, I think it's important to pay attention and I've talked about it over and over and over. We have got to look at our gut health as an integral part of our overall immunity.

So that'll come again in, in another in another place down the line in our, in our rebel raws, but, really important to look at as far as **SIBO, which stands for small intestinal bacterial overgrowth**. So that's S I B O it is bacteria that is maybe normal in other parts of the intestine. So maybe **there's bacteria that's in the lower part of the intestine or the colon, or even in the mouth, for example, that makes its way into a place where it's not supposed to be** right into the small intestine and it flourishes and it thrives there and it's not supposed to be there. And it creates all kinds of issues in terms of digestion of nutrients, digestion of food.

Impacts overall health on a very, very significant basis. And being recognized more and more in the general population, we used to think it was mainly people who had different kinds of stomach surgeries or people with colitis or things like that. Now we know we're seeing it much more prevalent in society, probably because we're just not eating the way we should be, not getting enough of the good, good bacteria that we do need or the good bugs so to speak.

But that is essentially what SIBO is in a nutshell.

EMILY: Awesome. That's very, very informative too. And I think that it's also really cool that you said the immune system and sleep and all that stuff relates back to the gut because I think that's something that a lot of people overlook and they don't realize that. Good sleep and good immune health, is one with gut health and all of that.

And mental, emotional

The link between serotonin, melatonin and our gut health

MERYL: Yeah. Yeah. And I don't, I didn't want to interrupt you, but I will only because there was a place that we were talking about and I talk about this all the time. For things like serotonin, serotonin is a neurotransmitter that people recognize as keeping us in a good mood and happy and balanced, right.

Emotionally, yet **serotonin is made in the gut**. We know from research that serotonin, **most of our serotonin is derived from the nutrient interaction in our gastrointestinal system**. So again, if our gut health is off our mood and so forth is going to be off. Same thing with melatonin. When we talk about sleep, we know there's lots of good literature.

I was just reading a study recently about melatonin and **melatonin is made inside partially it's the brain, it's the pituitary, all of those things that are interconnected, but derived primarily made in the gut**.

So I'm oversimplifying a very, very complex metabolic and biochemical process, but suffice to say that **melatonin is responsible for recharging the immune system**. So we need that. Right. And that's why it's important to sleep because melatonin is produced when we sleep. And there's a huge amount of gut interplay.

The link between the circadian rhythm and our gut health

EMILY: Yeah, that's really, really important. And also a perfect segue into our next question, which is about the circadian rhythm and you know, you and Dr. Van der Merwe in the last episode, talked a lot about the circadian rhythm towards the end and how critical it is to get

your body onto. It's natural circadian rhythm and feeding into that with good lifestyle choices and also getting good sleep and all of that.

So I know melatonin and serotonin play a huge role in all of that. But if you wanted to maybe speak more to the circadian rhythm maybe what are some things that people can actually do to get back in touch with their natural circadian?

MERYL: Right. Yeah, that's a great question because I think **people don't often equate sleep with gut health.**

And again, as much as I talk about the body being completely interconnected, and one thing always is going to affect something else. Sometimes we just don't, don't put those dots together and I think it's important to do so. And so **circadian rhythm it's our basic evolutionary clock.** And so, our bodies designed to wake up with the sun and go to sleep with the moon kind of thing. Now, granted, because of electricity, we don't do that. We all are up much longer than we should be, but essentially our bodies.

Functions are based on the circadian rhythm that our brains are more heightened and alert and aware in the morning than they are in the evening when things should be quieting down, right. Our digestion and our digestive process. It is much more active in the morning time than it is before we go to sleep.

And this is why we often have people who have reflux issues, right. Indigestion issues, because **our body wants to rest at night and it wants to digest at night.** And it can't be doing all that if there's all kinds of food in the system. So, so getting. With the sun as much as possible and,

and **setting our days up for balance both in the food that we eat and doing the activities that we do** making sure we're moving your motility.

We don't talk about this, but when we're sitting down all day long gut motility that peristaltic this movement that, that, that contractility in the body that helps move food along. In the digestive system, if we're not moving and using our muscles and, and the gut is a muscle, right? that the intestines have to contract.

If we're not moving and creating that movement and that activity and the flow, whether it's water intake and just basic movement, then our bodies become stagnant. And so a lot of people notice that when they move in the morning and they exercise in the morning, their bowel habits are much better, right?

Because they're using those muscles. And so **sitting down all day is not healthy for the gut** and not healthy for our digestive system. as is not eating late at night. Because late at night, your body wants to be resting and not digesting.

So if we're having to have the body make this gastric acid and all these acids and, and do this work at night, when it wants to be resting and recovering and making things like melatonin, it's going to interfere with that natural process. So just having good. Yeah. Healthy. And, and it, this is different for everybody, but having good, healthy lifestyle habits in terms of consuming, clean food, clean water, clean air, and, and good restful sleep.

And mindfulness, right? Yoga, meditation, those things also help keep the digestive system healthy. So I don't know if that was the long-winded answer to that question, but did it answer the question?

EMILY: Yeah, no, I think it was very, very helpful and a lot of great information in there. And it's not long-winded because it is a complex system to be able to talk about.

And it's an important topic. So the more information I think, the better And I like how you gave actual tips on what people can do in their day-to-day life, because that's the most important piece. We can talk all about the science and we can talk all about what goes into the circadian rhythm and the microbiome, but how can we actually implement that into our day-to-day life?

And how can we affect that with the smaller, sustainable choices that we make every day?

Right. So thank you for looping back to that.

Ad break

How to set ourselves up for success and make healthy changes

MERYL: I think it is important that recognizing habits are hard to change. And, when we talk about the work that we do here with our clients on the day to day and the week to week, it really is **about making very small changes incrementally** because if we try and change everything all at once, it's very unrealistic.

Right. You can't just completely change your diet from, if you were eating completely processed to say, oh, well, everything I'm going to eat now is going to be not processed in theory. That sounds good. But how do we really put that into play, in a practical way in our lives? And it's the same thing about sleep.

I hear this, you hear this all the time. And I think that is the one area that people have such a hard time with. It's like, well, I work all day or I'm with the kids all day, or I just have cleaned up

from dinner and I need downtime and I need my time and I, and I don't go to bed until much later.

And so what I try to say is, well, let's back into the day a little differently, but it's always with one thing because **we get stuck in these routines that become our habits**. And it's very hard to change those. And I had a client say to me the other day that there was fear around it. They were afraid to do it.

They weren't sure how to do it. So I feel like. **We also have to be gentle with ourselves and ease into these changes slowly**. And, and this is where the coaching, even if it's not with us, that you're doing coaching, you find a friend to lean on, to become accountable to so that you can slowly change these habits.

Because I think that's something that's not talked about. Like people hear all the time. Oh yeah. I have to reduce my stress. Oh yeah. I have to change my diet. Oh yeah. I have to get better on my sleep. How do I do that? So don't make it an insurmountable task chunk away at it one at a time.

And I think that's very, very important to remember.

EMILY: Yeah, I think that's really important too. I actually just read a quote this morning it said anxiety is when you try to do everything at once or you think you need to figure it all out at once. And you know, **the real key to success is taking it day by day and one step at a time**.

And not just diving in and cause if you're afraid of. The big picture and you're afraid of all the things you need to tackle at once. You're just going to be frozen and never take the first step. Right. So I think that's really awesome about how we help people at the Brandwein Institute. We

meet people where they're at, where they're ready to start, and we work within their lifestyle to try to make smaller changes that actually work for them.

And slowly, but surely we get them to where they want to be with smaller steps. So it's not so daunting and so scary to take the first step.

MERYL: Absolutely. Right. Because there's a lot of information here. Right. And, and we give people lots to think about and I feel like it does, it can be overwhelming, so.

Absolutely. Yeah. Great quote, great quote.

EMILY: All right. So that wraps up the questions that we got. I think between last episode and this one we've covered. Enough on GI health and that people are getting a really good idea of what they can do to improve their gut health. And as always, they can come in and see us.

You know, I have more questions or they can message us.

What kind of allergy testing is most accurate?

MERYL: And yeah, one thing, one thing I just want to touch on that I got as a last kind of a question from somebody was all about, we hear about allergy testing and, and food allergy testing. And that's something that I do want to clarify because there's a lot of confusion around it.

There's a lot of people out there who come in and say, well, I've done allergy testing, or I've done this kind of testing. And so we need to be very clear on what kind of testing it is. Is it true

allergy testing? I will tell you **the skin rash testing is generally not accurate when it comes to food allergies and sensitivities.**

Food allergy doesn't mean there's really not been a whole lot of great science, proving unequivocally that these tests are a hundred percent accurate. **I do think that we are using the gold standard in our practice in terms of allergy and sensitivity,** but it's also knowing how to interpret that testing and put it into play for people.

Because what I don't want people to think is, oh, well, all of a sudden I've developed this food allergy. I can never have this food ever again. And, and then it's one allergy on top of the other, and now people are left with very little food to eat. What I do want to go back to is that if you have any gut permeability, if you have leaky gut, you are going to what we call light up on every food, because every food is seen as a foreign invader by your body.

Every food is going to be a trigger. **When in actuality it's the gut, that's the issue, not the food.** And I think people really, really need to hear that because they're going again. That's more like the bandaid, right? We're using the bandaid of here's the food allergy. And I can't have this food when in actuality, if we get to the root, which is the gut health and the imbalance in the gut health, and we heal the gut.

You'd be surprised how many foods you can start to add in. So being again, we've got to go back to the beginning of understanding what is causing the food allergy. And then once we heal the gut, we can get a better understanding of, oh, is there a real food allergy or sensitivity? Because these things are very real for people, but it's knowing how to use that as a jumping off point and **really being able to evaluate the totality of our systems.**

EMILY: Yeah, that's a really, really important point to make because, sometimes people will just go about their life, avoiding those foods for the rest of time and they're miserable because, their foods that they love or they're. And a lot of times, correct me if I'm wrong, but I think the foods.

The foods that will light up are the foods that they often eat because they're dealing with a GI issue. Like you said, it's often the gut that's reacting to the foods they're putting in their body. So a lot of times they get those results and they're so disappointed and they think, oh, I have to eliminate this food.

It's all about restriction. When in reality we're trying to shift that focus for these people and say, no, **we can heal your gut and then you can have those foods again.**

The importance of food rotation

MERYL: Exactly. Yeah. No, and that's true. Right? We always say people come in and like, what do you mean? I'm allergic to avocado, I eat avocado every day.

I'm like, that's exactly why it's coming up because you're eating it every day. So yeah, we probably have to reduce the amount of avocado if that is coming up, because it is a little bit of a trigger initially. But if we heal the gut. And, fix that intestinal permeability, they will be able to introduce avocado back in and, and, and it also speaks to the fact that, **why we talk about people needing to rotate their foods.**

You know, people come in and say, we didn't say, well, I food every single day. I'm like, oh, there, that's not so good for so many different reasons. Right. And that's a whole other topic entirely.

There it is important to get different foods, maybe not every single day, but at least introducing different kinds of foods on a weekly basis, not only for gut health and overall health, but you know, you don't get different vitamins and minerals, nutrients from different foods.

So it's important to make sure that we're rotating for so many reasons, but yeah, that is a good point. People do light up on the very foods they eat, if, if they have gut intestinal permeability. So thank you for, for bringing that up.

EMILY: all good stuff. This is really good information. Thanks.

Of course.

MERYL: Yeah. Good. So, yeah, I think that wraps us up for today's session. Like I said, if you guys have questions, we love, love the questions, love the comments, keep them coming. I think we enjoy doing these in between segments when we get a real top-notch clinician on and we talk at a little more high level.

It's great to come back and revisit it on a more practical level. So people can relate a little bit more and it relates to their own personal journeys and how we can help them. So thank you for doing the back and forth with me.

EMILY: No problem. Thanks for having me.

MERYL: Of course. Of course. All right. Until next time everybody, this is your Rebel Nutritionist signing off, make it a great day.