



Feed your gut right to stay healthy

Have you ever had a “gut feeling”?

Well, science now shows that your gut or digestive system plays a much bigger role than we once thought. Aside from breaking down the food you eat, your gut houses trillions of bacteria that influence everything from your immune system and digestion to your mental well-being and even energy levels.

This is why taking care of your gut is essential for your overall health and one of the simplest ways to do so is by eating the right foods.

What’s so special about the gut?

Often referred to as the body’s “second brain”, the gut is closely connected to several key systems in the body, including the nervous and immune systems. A healthy gut microbiome – meaning the good bacteria that live in your intestines can help prevent illness, improve digestion and even boost your mood.

Emerging scientific evidence supports that a balanced gut environment can reduce the risk of digestive disorders, strengthen immune responses and contribute to mental clarity and emotional balance.

Meet the gastrointestinal (GI) superheroes: Probiotics, prebiotics and synbiotics. Let’s take a closer look at what these three terms mean.

The good bacteria

Probiotics are live microorganisms that add to the population of healthy bacteria in your digestive system. These can help restore balance when the gut microbiota is disrupted by stress, illness or poor diet.



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Common sources of probiotics:

- Cultured and fermented milk products
- Traditionally fermented foods such as *tempeh*, yoghurt (*tairu*), *tapai*, *kimchi*, sauerkraut and kefir
- Probiotic-enriched drinks and supplements
- Not all fermented foods qualify as probiotics, but many still contain beneficial live cultures.

Food for the good bacteria

Prebiotics are a type of dietary fibre that human bodies cannot digest. However, they serve as food for the beneficial bacteria in your gut, helping them grow and thrive.

Common sources of prebiotics:

- Bananas
- Onions
- Garlic
- Leeks
- Asparagus
- Oats

Combination of probiotics and prebiotics

Synbiotics work together to increase the survival and activity of beneficial microbes in the gut.

Synbiotic-rich meals include:

- Yoghurt with banana or mango
- Kefir blended with oats
- Commercially formulated products labelled as “synbiotic”

Why they matter

- Stronger immunity
- Smoother digestion
- Better mood
- Improved overall health, especially gut health



In recent years, the Nutrition Society of Malaysia (NSM) launched the Probiotics Education Programme (PEP) to raise public awareness on gut health.

Through surveys conducted under this programme, NSM found that while public knowledge of probiotics remains low, interest and willingness to learn are high.

Gut health is a growing concern in Malaysia, where lifestyle and dietary patterns have shifted towards processed and low-fibre foods. This increases the risk of digestive issues, low immunity and even mood disorders. The good news? Malaysians can benefit from gut-friendly foods already present in our traditional cuisine.

Easy gut-healthy meals you can try today

Here are some meal ideas to get you started on the path to better gut health:

Breakfast:

Yoghurt + banana + oats: A synbiotic trio to fuel your day.

Lunch:

Tempeh stir-fried with garlic and onion: Rich in both probiotics and prebiotics.

Snack:

Cultured milk drink or yoghurt smoothie with fruits or crunchy vegetables like carrots and celery.

Dinner:

Grilled chicken served with asparagus, *tempeh* and a side of *kimchi* or a mango lassi.

Small, consistent dietary changes can lead to long-term health improvements.

Mission to support Malaysians

NSM’s PEP aims to bridge the knowledge gap and help Malaysians make healthier, informed choices. Here’s how:

- **Educational materials:** NSM has created easy-to-understand infographics and interactive resources to explain gut health in simple terms.
- **Family-focused learning:** The programme offers guides and tools to help families incorporate more probiotics and prebiotics into their daily meals.
- **Smart shopping tips:** Malaysians are encouraged to read food labels and understand probiotic strains listed on products.

You can explore NSM’s free resources by visiting www.nutriweb.org.my/probiotics. And follow NSM on social media for daily gut health tips, recipes and facts.

Gut health is more than just avoiding constipation or indigestion, it encompasses a broader range of benefits. A well-nourished gut supports your immune function, nutrient absorption, mental well-being and overall vitality. As NSM reminds us, “Healthy gut, healthy life – start with your plate today!”

Contributed by the Nutrition Society of Malaysia (NSM)

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