

Understanding Gut Health



Our gut health is the starting point when it comes to improving our energy levels. The integrity of our gut lining, the strength of the beneficial bacteria (flora) population in our gut and of course what goes in our mouth all affects our gut health and how energetic we are.

Our gut lining needs to be strong, durable and full of healthy villi which are tiny finger-like projections coming out from the walls. The villi's job is to absorb nutrients and to protect the gut lining by producing mucous, but they can be damaged in those with food sensitivities such as gluten (in the case of coeliac disease), soy and dairy if those foods are consumed. Conditions such as Giardia, many auto-immune diseases, helicobacter pylori, some anti-inflammatory medications and alcohol intake can also cause damage and shrinkage of the villi. Fortunately, the vigour of the villi will return once the cause of the damage has been addressed.

Consuming a wholefoods diet packed with nutrients can fast-track the recovery of the villi, including natural anti-inflammatories such as omega 3 fats and turmeric. The better we can absorb the nutrients in our food by having strong villi, the more energy we will have.

The beneficial bacteria in our gut are totally extraordinary and also play a significant role in the amount of energy we have. Our total gut flora weighs more than 1 kg, has more roles to play in the body than any other organ and contains 10 times more cells than our own human cells. It produces short-chain fatty acids (SCFA's) that can assist the liver in energy production and also helps to lower cholesterol. When we have a strong army of gut flora, our colon cells are well fed and can function at their highest potential. A healthy gut flora population will also improve our immune system, regulate moods and boost our metabolism, all leading to increased energy and vitality.

In order to support our beneficial gut flora we need to be consuming enough fibre. The flora relies on the fibre we eat to maintain their population and to produce the SCFA's that then provide the fuel for the cells in our gut wall. Eating a variety of vegetables, fruit and legumes will ensure you have the full range of fibre for the flora to feast on. Remember, any sudden changes to your dietary fibre intake affects your gut flora significantly, for example, if your body isn't used to legumes you may experience bloating and gas. So slowly does it when increasing fibre to ensure a smooth ride along with a gradual but delicious increase in your energy.

Naturopath, Affordable Wholefoods