Eat Well, Live Long



The golden years! Time just slipped by and here we are, enjoying the **fruits and vegetables** of our labor. We have always been advised to get lots of these 2 food groups in our diet, and now we have **even more reasons** to do so.

Trillions of bacteria, viruses and other microscopic creatures live on and inside our bodies. They are referred to as our microbiome. We have communities of microbes on our skin, in our lungs, in our environments and this article will focus on the microbiome in our gut. Our **gut microbiome is a rich ecosystem** that performs a variety of functions in our bodies including protecting against harmful germs, regulating the immune system and making nutrients available for absorption.

Our gut makes nutrients available for absorption by feeding on compounds in food, which we cannot digest, like **fiber**. Breaking them down into components that our system can absorb. Basically, a healthy gut microbiome means that our digestion works more smoothly. Disturbances in our microbiome have been associated with several conditions including obesity, heart disease, inflammatory bowel disease and mental health disorders.

An important aspect of health and longevity is taking care of our gut microbiome. Turns out these microbes love fruits and vegetables (mainly for fiber) and do best when we exercise for 30 minutes, 3 times a week - sound familiar!!

These microscopic creatures also enjoy **fermented foods**...think yogurt, sauerkraut and a new food for me: kimchi. Just as important as feeding these guys foods that they thrive on is avoiding foods which are harmful to them.

Which foods are **harmful** to them you ask?
Basically, all those ingredients in food products which our mothers wouldn't recognize:

- Artificial sweeteners (i.e. sucralose, aspartame, saccharin)
- Food emulsifiers (i.e. carboxymethylcellulose, polysorbate 80)
- Preservatives (i.e. sorbates, benzoates, nitrites)
- Artificial food colours (i.e. tartrazine, amaranth, allure red)

A really nasty food additive, which comes from seaweed (so is marketed as being "natural") is **carrageenan**. It is used by the food industry as an emulsifier. Our gut microbiome can break it down, producing a compound that is a known gut irritant.

You will notice carrageenan on the ingredients list of whipping cream, coffee cream, ice cream, chocolate milk and many others of your favorite food products. Avoid it if you can!

So listen to your gut and enjoy a variety of **whole foods** that are a rich source of **fiber**. **Include fermented foods** as often as possible and **limit processed foods**. Don't forget…these teeny tiny little creatures also thrive best when we **stay active**!

Contributed by Patirica Long



Patricia has had a long and rewarding career as a dietitian, the last 22 years at Island Health. Recently retired, she continues to share her nutrition knowledge by volunteering with the Mid-Island Elder College as an instructor. Patricia also kindly shared her knowledge at our October general meeting