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What's Your Gut Telling You?

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What's your gut telling you? We've all heard the question. And although it's usually asked to see how we feel about a given issue or situation, it should also be a key question regarding our health—yet it's often overlooked, even when a variety of symptoms start popping up.

Leaky gut syndrome is a widespread problem that can present itself in many ways. When I was diagnosed with breast cancer in 2000 and began my quest for knowledge through voracious reading and research, I kept running across the idea that all cancers start in the gut or colon. I did not fully understand this until I dug deeper and found that millions of people are struggling with leaky gut syndrome, which not only affects the digestive system, but also is a precursor to many other health problems. Leaky gut could be the cause of thyroid issues, sluggish adrenals, joint pain, food allergies, autoimmune conditions, and low energy, to name a few.

So: what is this leaky gut syndrome, often referred to as “increased intestinal permeability”?

Picture the lining of your digestive tract as a net with tiny holes that are meant to allow only certain substances to pass, while preventing larger particles from getting through and damaging your system. When someone has leaky gut, the net in the digestive tract gets damaged, causing bigger holes to develop and larger, undesirable particles such as gluten and bad bacteria to get through. Toxic waste is then able to leak from the inside of your intestinal wall

into your bloodstream, causing immune reactions that lead to inflammation throughout your body. These produce symptoms like:

- Bloating
- Food sensitivities
- Thyroid conditions
- Fatigue
- Joint pain
- Headaches
- Skin issues, like rosacea and acne
- Digestive problems
- Weight gain

Leaky gut can affect the entire body, including your brain. One of the biggest warning signs that you may have leaky gut is multiple food sensitivities. Partially digested proteins and fat that seep through the intestinal lining into the bloodstream trigger allergic responses. If leaky gut is not healed, it can lead to very serious health issues, like inflammatory bowel disease, IBS, arthritis, eczema, psoriasis, depression, anxiety, migraine headaches, muscle pain, and chronic fatigue. Worse, there's strong evidence that leaky gut causes autoimmune diseases, including type 1 diabetes and malabsorption of vital minerals and nutrients, including zinc, iron and vitamin B12.

The research I've done indicates four main reasons for leaky gut syndrome:

- Poor diet
- Chronic stress
- Toxin overload
- Bacterial imbalance

The most common food items that may damage the lining of your intestine are proteins found in sugar, conventional dairy, GMO's and unsprouted grain. The problem with un-sprouted grain is that it contains too many nutrient blockers called phytates and lectins, which are sugar-binding

proteins that act as a natural defense system for plants. Good news for plants, but bad news for our bodies. The digestive lining is covered with sugar-containing cells that help break down food. Lectins gravitate to this area and then attach to your digestive lining, which damages the gut and causes inflammation.

Consumed in large amounts, lectins, found in wheat, corn, rice, and beans, among many other foods, can cause leaky gut.

Causes of leaky gut include:

- GMO and hybridized foods. These are the highest in lectins, since they are modified to fight off bugs. Grain with gluten damages the intestinal lining, and so can cause leaky gut syndrome.

- Conventional cow's milk. The part of dairy that harms the gut is the protein A1 casein. The pasteurization process destroys needed enzymes, which make digesting sugars like lactose difficult. I try to avoid dairy. But if you're consuming it, look for dairy that is raw from cows, goats, sheep, or buffalo.

- Sugar. It stresses the digestive system and feeds the growth of yeast, candida, and bad bacteria, all of which damage the gut. Bad bacteria create exotoxins, which damage healthy cells and can eat a hole into the intestinal wall.

- Chronic stress. Stress weakens the immune system and the ability to fight off foreign invaders like bad bacteria and viruses, which lead to inflammation and leaky gut. Sleep is essential to healing and reducing stress. I had to change my schedule and train myself to get to bed much earlier, and it has paid off for me.

- Dysbiosis. This is an imbalance between the good



and bad bacteria in your gut, and it's a leading cause of leaky gut. Sometimes the imbalance begins at birth due to a C-section or because the mother had leaky gut. It may also be caused by the overuse of prescription antibiotic drugs, tap water with chlorine and fluoride, or a lack of probiotics. I have an alkaline, ionized Living Water unit attached to my faucet, which eliminates harmful toxins and provides me with great-tasting water.

We come into contact with over 80,000 chemicals and toxins each year. Some of the most common and worst are: antibiotics, pesticides, aspirin and NSAIDS.

Living and eating healthily are very difficult in our world; therefore I encourage you to make one small change to your diet and lifestyle each week or every other week for healing to your body and mind. I have learned that health is a precious gift that I am most grateful for each day. My hope is that you'll soon be empowered to make decisions that will bring you peace joy and gratitude.

Julia Chiappetta is the author of "Breast Cancer: The Notebook" (Gemini Media, 2006) and is also the owner of Julia Chiappetta Consulting. She lives in Cos Cob. Her photo is above right.