LEAKY GUT

You mean like a sieve? Why is it leaky? Isn’t the gut supposed to “leak”? How you can tell if your gut “leaks”? I hear this questions quite often, especially for the past few years. More and more people had to learn the hard way why their gut “leaks”. So what is leaky gut anyway?

The proper term for “leaky gut” is intestinal hyper permeability. The role of the intestinal tract has been studied extensively, not only for nutrient and electrolyte absorption but also for protection against toxins, pathogenic bacteria and viruses.

The intestinal lining is a very important barrier designed to allow nutrients of a certain size to pass into the bloodstream to be transported to all cells. In a healthy gut, zonulin-a protein in charge of controlling the microscopic openings in intestinal lining regulates the opening size. When this process is altered, the opening in the intestinal lining allows larger food molecules, pathogenic bacteria and toxins to enter the bloodstream. The immune system mounts an inflammatory response to these particles. One might expect that symptoms would be confined to the gastrointestinal tract like bloating, diarrhea and/or constipation, urgency to empty the bowels, gas, food sensitivities, IBS (irritable bowel syndrome). Nevertheless, the symptoms are not confined to the gastro intestinal tract, and although a causal relationship has not been established yet, many diseases like celiac disease, autoimmune hepatitis, type 1 diabetes, multiple sclerosis, and certain skin conditions (eczema, rosacea) to name a few are linked to leaky gut.

The scientists are still working hard on identifying all the causes for leaky gut. So far the following have been suspected as a cause:

* SAD (standard American diet) abundant in sugar and processed foods and lacking wholesome foods
* Heavy alcohol consumption
* Gluten-protein found in wheat, spelt, kamut, farro, durum, barley, rye. Although oats don’t contain gluten, due to processing, can be contaminated and might trigger a reaction in gluten sensitive people.
* Low stomach acid, which may be caused by overuse of anti acid medication, over use of antibiotics, Helicobacter pylori bacteria, chronic stress.
* Yeast overgrowth (Candida species)
* Parasitic infections

The jury is still out on finding other causes for increased permeability.

Reading this article so far paints a very depressing picture. It seems that leaky gut might be at the root of so many diseases that were unheard of in a not so distant past. Therefore, let’s focus more on what can be done to prevent or improve the consequences of a leaky gut:

* Decrease with the goal of eliminating processed foods
* Increase the amount of wholesome foods-shop organic and local
* Eat more foods or meals made from scratch or restaurants that pride themselves in serving “field to fork”
* Manage your chronic stress by meditating, exercising, breathing techniques, reading a good magazine like this one, or anything that brings your stress level down.
* Consume alcohol in moderation: 1 drink for the ladies and 2 drinks for the gents
* Identify and address food sensitivities. Speak with a dietitian experienced in dealing with this topic.
* Consume probiotic containing foods like Kefir (similar to yogurt but with a lot more strains of probiotics); fermented veggies like sauerkraut, Kim chi, pickles; kombucha (fermented tea), natto (fermented soybeans), apple cider vinegar (suggest Bragg’s brand) and brine cured olives.
* Consume prebiotic fiber to serve as the food for the probiotics. Foods rich in prebiotics: raw Jerusalem artichoke or sunchoke; raw garlic onions and leeks; chicory root (rich in inulin); bananas, apples; whole grains.

I hope that you’ve read the article on “leaky gut” rather as a curiosity and not because you or a loved one might have the symptoms and suspect it. But if you do, I hope that I’ve provided you with good description to recognize it and tips and suggestions to heal it. As always, please consult with your doctor as this article is not intended to treat or substitute medical care.

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