THE LEAKY GUT GUIDE

18 Signs You Have Leaky Gut
+ How to Start Healing NOW

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As Hippocrates said, “All disease begins in the gut,” which also tells me that all healing beings in the gut....

**What Is Leaky Gut?**

Leaky gut, also more scientifically referred to as intestinal permeability, is a condition that occurs when the lining of the small intestines (which is where 90% of your nutrient absorption occurs and where the largest density of your immune cells live) becomes not only porous, but also inflamed and damaged. This can be problematic because this allows undigested food particles, bacteria and miscellaneous antigens (or foreign invaders) to “leak” into the bloodstream.

**Tight Junctions 101**

Have you ever seen grout that is used in-between tiles to keep the flooring together slowly separate over time, or Velcro that has lost its ability to stick together over time, or even your favorite cable-knit sweater that has been washed too many times and begins to unravel, fray and lose its shape? If you answered yes, then you now have a visual of what is occurring in your GI tract when you experience intestinal permeability, aka leaky gut.

The “grout” in your small intestines would be akin to what is known as our tight junctions, which are a type of cell that plays a role in cell adhesion to gut lining and also regulates the permeability of the intestinal barrier. Tight junctions sort of act like the traffic cops of your GI tract, as they limit the passage of molecules and ions between cells; they are the gateway between your intestines and what is allowed to pass into the bloodstream. Tight junctions help to maintain the balance between allowing nutrients to enter your sterile bloodstream and remaining small and permeable enough to prevent pathogens from passing out of your digestive system into the rest of the body. As tight junctions begin to break down over time (or as the grout starts to separate), molecules that should remain inside of the intestines begin to leak into the bloodstream, which, to put it simply really, stresses the body out and leads to a total body stress response.

**Why Is This Bad?**

Have you ever had an unannounced visitor show up at your door in the middle of the night? Or maybe a houseguest you know you don’t want staying with you
while they are visiting in town because they eat all of your food, wreck your guest bedroom, and spill organic coffee all over your new white rug? Well, that is what happens when we have things leaking into the bloodstream that shouldn’t be there.

Once these invaders leak into the bloodstream, it sends a signal to the rest of our body that something is toxic, unknown and foreign, which triggers the immune response to ignite an inflammatory response throughout the entire body (and research is finding chronic inflammation to be the root cause of most disease). This can lead to a whole host of metabolic dysfunction and cellular chaos throughout all of our body systems, which can manifest as decreased immunity, low energy levels, digestive issues (bloating, gas, belching, etc.), improper bowel function, depression, joint pain, food allergies, eczema, psoriasis, autoimmune disease, asthma, and chronic inflammation, to name a few symptoms.

Inflammation, after all, is your body’s non-specific response to a stressor (real or perceived), so while this may seem annoying to you when you are experiencing one or several of your many health symptoms (see above), your body is actually doing this as an attempt to protect you from what seems dangerous (because we all know how hard it can be to get a houseguest to leave sometimes).

**What Causes Leaky Gut?**

Identifying the root cause of any health issue is important not only for a healing protocol, but also for understanding how to avoid—or at least mitigate—triggers that can lead to a relapse of your symptoms. Trying to pinpoint one main cause of leaky gut can be arduous, but there are a few repeat offenders (aka contributing factors) that can contribute to the development of leaky gut and decreased gut health overall.

**Diet:** This should come as no surprise, as what we choose to put at the end of our fork can either contribute or contain not only our GI cells, but our whole body health. Foods that tend to be most problematic, irritating and damaging to the gut include dairy, wheat, gluten, soy, corn, sugar, eggs and even nightshades. This can also include alcohol and caffeine, so if you are serious about healing and sealing your gut, I would consider eliminating all of the above foods and beverages during a 30-90 day healing protocol.

It should also be noted that even if a certain food is “healthy,” it might not be healthy for you, so addressing underlying and unknown food sensitivities is
important when attempting to not put the immune system into overdrive mode. Antigens, lectins and proteins found in certain foods can irritate the gut lining, leading to separation of the tight junctions and inflammation of the microvilli, which are finger-like projections required not only for nutrient absorption, but also the production of digestive enzymes.

**Medications/Birth Control/OTCs:** Many OTC medications not only irritate the gut lining, but also deplete the GI tract of vital nutrients and minerals (such as iron, zinc and B vitamins) that are required for the integrity of the cells that line the intestines. This also includes antacids, antibiotics, certain medications and even poor quality supplements (all of which can contain fillers such as gluten and dairy), as well as artificial colors and sweeteners (which can inflame and irritate the gut, increasing the risk of leaky gut development).

**Additional HIDDEN stressors:** Stress is any influence—internal or external—that causes or leads to malfunction. The effects of stress can contribute to the development and creation of imbalances throughout the body, which include your gut. This can include hormone, immune, digestion, detoxification, environmental toxins and nervous system stressors. Emotional and physical stress (e.g., lack of quality sleep, over exercising, undereating, energy vampires, negative thoughts, and micronutrient, vitamin and mineral deficiencies) can all contribute to our body’s stress load. Don’t forget to look into the quality of your food, which includes making sure you are eating organic, pasture-raised, grass-fed produce and proteins, as well as avoiding environmental toxins from plastic exposure, cosmetics, cleaning products, beauty products, perfumes, mouthwash, toothpaste and unfiltered tap water.

Chronic stress can lead to the release of stress hormones (such as cortisol), which essentially turn off digestion, degrade the gut lining, increase intestinal permeability (through a protein known as zonulin), and can lead to decreased gut microbiota diversity (which, in turn, leads to overall gut dysbiosis).

**Infections:** Having an overgrowth of pathogenic bacteria (or too much of the wrong kind of bacteria) can lead to overgrowth of additional harmful bacteria, yeasts, parasites and intestinal viruses, which can contribute to the progression and development of leaky gut. Addressing bacteria and parasite overgrowth can be tricky, since the vast majority of bacteria are hidden in biofilms (a sort of protective force field around the bacteria). More than eighty percent of human bacterial infections are associated with bacterial biofilm, so developing a proper biofilm
disrupting protocol is essential when addressing and healing intestinal permeability.

**Digestive Imbalances:** Most people have heard the saying “you are what you eat,” but truly, you are what you absorb. Digestion is an extremely metabolically active and complex process that requires having the right amount of enzyme production and stomach acid to not only break down our food, but also absorb the nutrients. If we are deficient in digestive enzymes and HCL, it can allow undigested food particles to essentially ferment in the gut, which can lead to bacterial and pathogen overgrowth, gut irritation and inflammation, and ultimately intestinal permeability.

Chronic digestive imbalances (due to lack of enzymes, stomach acid or pathogen overgrowth) can lead to compromised immunity by congestion digestive-related lymph nodes, which lead to inflammation, lymph congestion and stress on the intestinal wall. This isn’t great because the lymphatic system carries the bulk of the body’s immunity; when the lymphatic system gets congested (as a result of digestive distress), the body’s immune system can overreact.

**Inflammation:** I like to put this one last, because inflammation is ultimately the end result of the accumulation of all of the above contributing factors. Inflammation is really just a knee-jerk reaction, if you will, of your immune system to protect you, your body and your cells from all of the diet and lifestyle stressors we encounter on a daily basis. Inflammation can be caused by infections, autoimmune disease, dysbiosis, irritation from medications, antibiotics, birth control, OTCs, food allergies, stress, chemicals (which includes cosmetics, cleaning supplies, and beauty products), and poor liver and kidney function.

**How Do I Know If I Have Leaky Gut?**

There are certain functional lab tests (which include breath, stool and urine tests) that you can run to assess the integrity of your GI tract, intestinal permeability, parasitology, gut inflammation, barrier function, and overall digestion and absorption, but these can get pricey pretty quickly and often aren’t covered by insurance. While this is something I definitely encourage at some point in your health journey, you might want to consider listening to your body first (by paying attention to symptoms, triggers and hidden stressors) and then look into investing in some natural diet, supplement and lifestyle protocols, as well as working with a qualified nutritionist, naturopathic doctor or functional medicine practitioner who can help guide you during your healing process.
If you experience a combination of the following symptoms for longer than 2 weeks at a time, you likely are dealing with intestinal permeability or general gut dysbiosis and inflammation. These symptoms include:

- Chronic diarrhea, constipation and gas
- Changes in bowel movements, which include appearance of stools, texture and color
- Abdominal pain and bloating
- Poor immune system functioning
- Excessive fatigue
- Headaches, brain fog, memory and mood issues such as depression, anxiety, ADHD
- Skin issues such as rashes, eczema, acne or rosacea
- Joint and muscle pain
- Trouble sleeping
- Foul-smelling urine, sweat and body odor
- Mood fluctuations
- Histamine intolerances
- Increased food sensitivities and intolerances
- Cravings for sugar and carbohydrates
- Blood sugar imbalances and excessive appetite
- Issues maintaining weight
- Autoimmune disease such as RA, Lupus, Celiac, Crohn’s, Hashimoto’s
- Nutritional deficiencies
Gut Healing Protocol: 5 Rs of Gut Health

**Remove:** In the first step of a gut-healing protocol, we want to remove any offending triggers that may be affecting your overall gut health. This includes food sensitivities and allergies, gut infections, as well as common gut irritants such as caffeine, alcohol and additional hidden stressors listed earlier in this book. Anything damaging to the gastrointestinal tract should be removed. This includes overgrowth of bad bacteria, viruses, fungi and parasites. This can often be done with herbs such as garlic, wormwood and black walnut. Allergenic foods should also be removed, as well as environmental toxins from tap water, cosmetic and beauty products as well as cleaning products and poor quality supplements.

**Repair:** There are many supplements and herbs that help soothe and repair damage to the gastrointestinal lining, as well as “heal and seal” the gut. We want to focus on not only regenerating the cells that line the GI tract, but also reducing inflammation in the intestines overall. Glutamine, N-acetyl glucosamine, DGL licorice, slippery elm, and aloe vera leaf are some of the most popular options when it comes to supplements. Bone broth, collagen and cabbage juice can also be healing to the gut. Healing nutrients for the gut that can often become depleted during times of stress and inflammation include zinc, methyl B12, iron, ginger root, quercetin and curcumin.

**Replace:** We need to focus on replacing substrates that are essential for healthy digestion, which can include digestive enzymes, bile salts, and hydrochloric acid. These substances are all important and required in the process of breaking down and absorbing our food, as well as in preventing the development of gut infections and pathogen overgrowth.

Hydrochloric acid is produced by the stomach to help digest food as well as to prevent the growth of pathogenic bugs and bacteria. A role of hydrochloric acid in our stomachs is to help to sterilize food, pathogens, bugs and harmful agents entering the body. Part of a GI restoration can possibly include supplementing with HCL. Digestive enzymes are released by the pancreas and help to chemically break down food as part of digestion. If the body is not making enough HCL or digestive enzymes, replacing them with supplements can help restore proper digestive function.

**Relax:** Vitamin “R,” aka relaxation, is going to be an integral part of your healing
process with the gut. Research has shown stress to negatively affect a variety of digestive factors, including gut motility (how our food moves through the gut), blood flow to our digestive organs, as well as the tight junction integrity between the cells of the gut lining.

**Re-inoculate:** Supplementing with probiotics often helps to restore balance to the intestinal gut flora. There is caution with this, as certain strains of probiotics can make matters worse; using a soil-based or yeast-based probiotic might be best in the beginning, such as Saccharomyces boulardii and bacillus coagulans.

If you are interested in working with Brianna please visit her website, [www.briannadiorio.com](http://www.briannadiorio.com), to learn more about her education, credentials, services and general health and wellness philosophies.