- Food—fiber content



Fibre is the most important dietary ingredient

If you wish to improve the health of the 100 trillion+ bacteria in your gut, one thing makes all the difference, according to researchers.

HEALTH Colourful vegetables, crunchy whole grains, juicy meat, or maybe legumes? A major new study from the University of Trento tells us what to eat to keep our gut healthy. And one ingredient seems to make all the difference, whether you eat meat or are a vegetarian or a vegan.

The study is based on 21,561 people who had samples taken from their gut microbiome: the vast community of microorganisms that exist in our gut.

The thousands of participants included people with varying diets, with meat-eating omnivores, vegans and vegetarians taking part in the study to find out how different diets affect the bacteria in our gut.

The study found that meat (and especially red rather than white meat) was generally linked to microbes associated with poorer cardiometabolic health, it was plant-based foods that had the greatest benefit to the gut. Vegan and vegetarian diets were generally better for the gut, with vegan signature microbes correlated with favourable cardiometabolic markers, but these were also enriched in omnivores who consumed a wider variety of plant-based foods.

So the researchers conclude that regardless of the general diet, it is the quality and variety of plant-based foods in particular that have the greatest impact on a healthy microbiome.

The secret is not to avoid either meat or dairy, but to consume a variety of fibre-rich, plant-based foods, says the study, published in the journal *Nature*. Fill your plate with vegetables of all colours, and raise the amount of fibre especially. Vegetables, fruit, nuts and whole grains help form short-chain fatty acids such as butyrate, which reduce inflammation and strengthen the immune system.

"Avoiding meat or dairy products does not necessarily have a positive effect if it does not come with a variety of quality plant-based products." says Segata. "For gut biome health, it is important to eat many plant-based foods, especially those rich in fibre."