What is Stressed Gut?

Causes of Stressed Gut include emotional stress, thyroid issues, adrenal fatigue, high cortisol and high estrogen levels.

Here’s an interesting fact: 90 percent of serotonin is released in your GI tract! When we become stressed emotionally, this directly affects our intestines and the microbes that line our gut wall. If we are frustrated by a traffic jam, worried about a loved one or building up tension in a busy day, our bodies release stress hormones (such as cortisol or norepinephrine).

These are the same hormones we need in dangerous fight-or-flight situations, but for our everyday stresses, they’re usually overkill. They can throw the ecology of your gut out of whack. When stress hormones are released, this essentially shuts down our digestive system and our immune system.

Why? In case we need to run for our lives, all of our energy goes to different systems of the body that heighten awareness and physical strength. It’s a normal response to have, but it’s not sustainable for long periods. And every time it happens, we are left unprotected from infection and an overgrowth of bad bacteria in the gut.

**Diet**

High in foods that boost immune function, reduce inflammation, digest easily and rank high in B vitamins and omega-3s — as well as those packed with selenium and magnesium.

**Supplements**

Probiotics, adaptogenic herbs to combat stress (including licorice root and ashwagandha), vitamin B12, selenium and L-glutamine.

**Lifestyle**

Address the root causes of Stressed Gut, such as chronic stress on the small intestine that causes nutrient malabsorption. This malabsorption and chronic inflammation in the gut will then lead to issues with the adrenals, kidneys and thyroid gland. Those with these issues tend to overexert and exhaust themselves, may be workaholics, deep thinkers, sensitive, determined and may have experienced serious emotional or physical life trauma.
In other gut types, eating the wrong foods can cause mental states such as depression or anxiety. With Stressed Gut, it works the other way around: It starts with a stressful mental state. The result is more than what we bargained for because it can lead to:

- Impaired absorption of nutrients
- Reduced oxygen to the organs
- Less blood flow to the digestive tract — four times less
- Fewer enzymes in the gut — up to 20,000 times fewer
5-STEP STRATEGY FOR HEALING STRESSED GUT

In order to overcome Stressed Gut, follow these 5 steps:

1. Know the Cause of Stressed Gut

2. Eliminate Foods Toxic to the Adrenals, Kidneys and Thyroid

3. Consume Therapeutic Foods

4. Treat with Supplements

5. Transform Your Lifestyle
Know the Cause of Stressed Gut

As stated earlier, the cause of Stressed Gut can be emotional stress, thyroid issues, adrenal fatigue and high cortisol (stress hormones) levels.

Gut bacteria detect when the body’s under stress. In fact, during times of stress, gut bacteria become less diverse and increase in the number of potentially harmful bacteria. Of course, these changes can also lead to immune imbalance and being more susceptible to infections or sickness.

That’s why it’s important to focus your efforts on restoring the overall health of your gut, especially as it relates to managing the health of your adrenal glands, kidneys and thyroid — all adversely affected by stress.

When the body’s under stress, it activates the secretion of hormones and constricts blood vessels and involuntary muscles of the body — leading to increased heart rate, glucose metabolism and oxygen consumption. The adrenal glands (two walnut-shaped glands that sit on top of the kidneys) kick in, too, during stress.

The adrenals secrete hormones such as cortisol, epinephrine and norepinephrine, and they regulate the body’s stress response. When stress is high or nonstop, high amounts of cortisol are released, leaving the body’s resources depleted and unable to adapt to the stress. This can even lead to a condition called adrenal fatigue.

However, the hormones secreted by the adrenals are also directly related to thyroid health. The thyroid is a butterfly-shaped gland located in the lower neck and plays a big role in the body’s metabolic processes. The truth is that healthy thyroid function is dependent on healthy adrenal glands.

Stressors such as demanding work schedules, aggressive deadlines, illness, strained relationships, emotional stress and more can lead to Stressed Gut. However, other “unseen” stressors such as leaky gut, blood sugar swings, food intolerances (particularly gluten), environmental or food toxins, inflammation and more can also cause Stressed Gut. For instance, gluten can trigger autoimmune responses, including Hashimoto’s thyroiditis, in those who are gluten-sensitive. All of these “unseen” stressors can cause the adrenals to pump out even more stress hormones.

That’s why eating foods high in probiotics, enzymes and B vitamins (particularly vitamin B12) are important because they directly support these organs. Probiotics, magnesium and B vitamins are stress fighters, while B12 helps with proper cellular function as well. Likewise, foods rich in omega-3 fatty acids support healthy inflammation levels and more.
Eliminate Foods Toxic to the Adrenals, Kidneys and Thyroid

Here are foods that can contribute to a Stressed Gut:

- **High-sugar foods** create swings in blood sugar (a body stressor in itself) and mood swings, both of which can lead to emotional stress and more.

- **Caffeine** is a stimulant that can increase anxiety, which stimulates the adrenals, can harm the thyroid and can also put pressure on the kidneys and adrenals.

- **Alcohol** can provoke anxiety and is not a positive way to manage stress.

- **Processed and refined flour** is converted to sugar in the body, leading to fluctuations in blood sugar and mood swings, both of which are strong stressors on the body.

- **Grains** can quickly turn into sugar and overstress the body. Replace grains with more vegetables, fruits, beans, healthy fats, quality protein and starchy vegetables.

- **Cold foods**, like drinking ice water or constantly eating salads, can make the digestive system have to work much harder. Instead, aim for more meals like a bowl of warm bone broth chicken vegetable soup and drinking a warm cup of tea during the day.
3 Consume Therapeutic Foods

To heal Stressed Gut, eating the right foods is vital. For this type of leaky gut, my recommendations include:

- **Salty foods as well as dark-colored foods** — those that are purple, black or blue — are mainstays for Stressed Gut people. Choose fresh wild fish, grass-fed beef and bison, free-range chicken, organic turkey, organ liver from beef and chicken, beans, seaweed and sea vegetables, miso, figs, blueberries, blackberries, eggplant, kale, wild rice, walnuts and black sesame seeds. These foods contain specific nutrients to support the kidneys and adrenals.

- **Foods filled with probiotics and enzymes** — such as probiotic-rich yogurt, kefir, fermented vegetables, sprouted foods, raw veggies and fruits — keep your probiotic and enzyme levels up.

- **Foods high in B vitamins** — such as grass-fed beef, liver, poultry, spirulina and green leafy vegetables — help regulate mood, bust stress and boost cellular energy.

- **Sea salt** should be used instead of iodized salt. Sprinkle a bit on each meal to support hydration.

- **Foods high in magnesium** — such as sprouted seeds (pumpkin, chia, flax, sesame), sprouted nuts, avocados, spinach, chard, figs and sea vegetables — calm the nerves.

- **Foods high in omega-3 fatty acids** — such as wild cold-water fish, wild salmon, grass-fed meats and sprouted seeds — can reduce inflammation and help stabilize mood.

- **Foods high in protein and amino acids** — like bone broth, beef and chicken liver, grass-fed meat from bison and beef, poultry, wild game and wild-caught fish — support metabolism and hormone balance.
Here are some supplements that can help with Stressed Gut:

**Ashwagandha** is an adaptogenic herb that helps the body adapt to fight stress better and improves DHEA-S (the most abundant steroid in humans), helping your body manage stress and get quality sleep. Other adaptogenic herbs that may help include licorice root, rhodiola and holy basil (tulsi).

**Vitamin B12** supports cellular energy and improves thyroid and adrenal function.

**Selenium** relieves oxidative stress.

**L-glutamine** is an amino acid that reduces gut stress and helps heal the intestinal lining.

**Probiotics** help establish a normal balance of microbes in your gut, which improves the way your body deals with stress.
According to ancient Chinese medicine, those who experience Stressed Gut tend to have those particular problems because their primary emotional responses when facing conflicts are fear, indecisiveness or uncertainty. On the flip side, Stressed Gut people are also known for their strong wills, uncompromising determination and using caution when approaching situations or people.

They’re also creative, sensitive, reflective, persuasive, effective and deep thinkers — all attractive personal traits. In order to completely heal Stressed Gut, you must address those emotions as well as the precipitating factors.

It’s also important to note that those with Stressed Gut are seemingly always up for challenges, but to meet those challenges, they can become hermit-like and turn into workaholics. By the same token, Stressed Gut people also value family, friends and remaining in contact with people.

You can see how being a hermit-like workaholic who also wants to be with people he or she loves can cause stress. It’s difficult to do both of those effectively — working all the time and being fully engaged with important people in your life — as both can lead to continual stress.

It’s a constant balancing act, so the challenge for Stressed Gut people is to put fear and indecisiveness in its place and to fully express creativity while participating in and enjoying life.

For those who are wired emotionally like this, it’s common for them to put stress on their adrenals, kidneys and thyroid, leading to digestive issues, including leaky gut. In fact, it’s not uncommon for Stressed Gut people to also have urinary issues, low libido, infertility and other hormone-related problems.
Find and have available three “go-to” stress relievers that work for you. These could be taking a few deep breaths, stepping outside for a few minutes, reminding yourself to just “let it go,” perking up your posture and carrying yourself confidently (stress can make you hunched over) or planning something you look forward to at the end of your stress-filled day.

Be sure to carve out time to socialize and take a break from work. Because Stressed Gut type individuals tend to take on a lot of challenges work-wise and retreat to get it done, it’s important to schedule and engage in social time and remove yourself from the isolating work vortex. Just like you have a work schedule, you need to have a set “fun time” and “relaxation time” in your weekly schedule.

Exercise for at least 30 minutes every other day. Choose something you enjoy, such as Pilates or yoga. Exercise is a great stress-buster. Join a family member, friend or group of friends for your exercise time. The socialization will be good for you.

Meditate, try guided imagery or listen to mellow music for at least 10 minutes each day. Let your mind and body de-stress with meditation -- maybe by reading scripture or other uplifting, calming content. You can also try guided imagery, which is designed to use your imagination to relax you. For example, if you love the beach, imagine yourself there — with all the sights, sounds and smells — and soak it in. Music can also help you keep stress in its place. Try something soothing or that gives you happy thoughts.

Taking a detox bath is one of the best ways to relieve stress. In the evening after dinner, add one cup of Epsom salts and 20 drops of lavender oil to a hot bath and soak for 20 minutes. Then drink a warm glass of chamomile tea.
Stressed Gut Daily Routine

Everyone’s schedule is different, but here’s 9-to-5 work weekday timeline for your new daily routine. You can tweak it as you need to.

7:00 a.m. Upon Waking
Take a few minutes to breathe deeply to start out your day more relaxed. Also, be sure to plan something you can look forward to at the end of your day.

8:00 a.m. Breakfast and Supplements
Enjoy a Stressed Gut-friendly breakfast, such as a veggie omelet or yogurt and berries. Pack your lunch and snacks (if you didn’t the night before) and take your first round of supplements including probiotics, vitamin B or B-complex and L-glutamine.

10:00 a.m. Herbal Tea
Drink an 8–16-ounce glass of warm herbal tea like tulsi or licorice tea.

12:00 p.m. Lunch
Lunch can be light, and it could include a large salad with avocado or a warm bowl of bone broth soup.

5:00 p.m. Get Active
Do a fun workout in a group setting like barre, Pilates, yoga, crossfit, spinning, weight training or burst training.

6:30 p.m. Dinner and Supplements
Make sure you follow through on what you had planned in the morning to do after your work day was finished. Dinner should include B-vitamin packed foods, such as grass-fed beef and green leafy veggies (like kale or spinach). Take your supplements at this time, including probiotics, vitamin B or B-complex and L-glutamine.

8:00 p.m. Before Bedtime Bath
It’s time to take a nice relaxing bath. Add one cup of Epsom salts and 20 drops of lavender oil to a hot bath and soak for 20 minutes. Then drink a warm glass of chamomile tea.

10:00 or 10:30 p.m. Bedtime
Turn off the TV an hour before bed and spend some time reading a relaxing or uplifting book.