What is Leaky Gut?

Hey, everyone, Dr. Axe here. So excited you’re part of my Healing Leaky Gut Program. I know this program is going to change your health and life. And, in one of these first trainings, I want to talk about what leaky gut is. Specifically, what causes it, the things you need to avoid in order to heal it, and even a few steps at the end and some actions you want to take immediately. But, really what I want to discuss again is, what is leaky gut and what specifically is happening in the body. And, I believe if you’re going to overcome any health issue, it’s so important to be educated. Really understand the process that happens in your body. And, so, again, I’m going to go through specifically what leaky gut is, what happens in the body, what causes it. And also some of the symptoms and really the progression that takes place.

There are actually millions of people struggling with leaky gut right now. And they have no idea it’s the cause of their health problems. And to quote Hippocrates, the father of modern medicine, he’s famous for saying, “Let food be thy medicine.” But, he said something else, he said, “All disease begins in the gut.” Think about that. Not some, but all disease begins in your gut. And if you’ve got gut issues, it is the root cause, it’s at the root of what’s causing other issues.

I know that a lot of people, in our Western society today, tend to try and pinpoint and treat the organ at hand where their disease is. So, if somebody has thyroid disease, they want to treat the thyroid. If somebody has a heart condition, they want to treat the heart. If they have depression, they want to treat the brain. Where we know, according to Hippocrates, if somebody is having a thyroid issue, like Hashimoto’s disease, that could actually start in the gut. And, so, if you’re only treating the thyroid alone, you’re not going to actually heal the thyroid condition because you’re not taking care of the root cause of disease. And, I’m telling you right now that’s what leaky gut is. It’s the root cause of the majority of health conditions that people are struggling with all across the world today.

And, so, we’re going to jump into what leaky gut is. So imagine this. This is essentially what leaky gut is and how it works. But, leaky gut occurs when you get holes in the tight junctions in your gut. By the way, I want to mention this, I think this is incredible. But, for years people questioned whether leaky gut actually existed. And, from what we see now, the other term that’s used in the medical community now today for leaky
gut is called “intestinal permeability.” Okay? Intestinal permeability. Permeability means open, porous. Things can leak or get through. It’s referenced in medical studies today. Listen to this, leaky gut or intestinal permeability are mentioned over 11,000 [times] in PubMed. And, an increased intestinal permeability is referenced almost 5,000 times in PubMed. So, again, you’re seeing here over 11,000 medical references to this condition. So, obviously it exists. Obviously it’s a major cause of health issues with everyone all across the world today.

And, we’re going to get into some of the specific conditions in a minute. But, to put it this way, imagine your gut is a net. Okay? And what can happen over time is . . . And by the way, everyone’s gut should be somewhat leaky to where certain things can get in and certain get out. But, imagine a very small fine net. Like a fisherman’s net. And you get bigger, you get holes in there. It gets ripped. And, imagine you take your hands and you rip open the net. So, now when you’re trying to catch fish, you’re doing certain things that they’re pouring out. There’s a hole in your net per se. That’s essentially what happens in leaky gut. You get a larger hole than should be there in your small intestine, your intestinal wall.

So, things start actually leaking from your gut into your bloodstream that should never get into your bloodstream. And when things get into your bloodstream that your body doesn’t recognize or that shouldn’t be there in the first place, your body will start an immune reaction or an inflammatory reaction. It’ll start to say, “Okay, this shouldn’t be here. This is a foreign invader. I’m going to start an immune response to break down and destroy whatever is here in the bloodstream.” So, that’s what happens initially. And so what happens is rather than a net, the way it’s referenced in the medical literature is they call them tight junctions or gateways. So, imagine there’s essentially a gateway to where your intestines say, “Okay, gluten, you can’t get in. And other things, you can’t get in. But, oh, small sugar molecules, okay, you can actually get in the bloodstream,” and so on and so forth. And so you’ll see here with leaky gut that you are actually . . . Certain things should pass through, other things shouldn’t but they’re referenced as tight junctions or the gateway between your intestines and what’s allowed into your bloodstream.

And, essentially leaky gut is where your tight junctions become damaged and certain particles like toxins, microbes or bad bacteria, undigested food particles like undigested protein, those things leak into the bloodstream. And, then an immune
response starts. And another example would be just imagine having a leaky gut is like having the gates broken. You’re breaking down the gate to your intestines into your bloodstream. And, when this happens, it also causes inflammation. So, again, inflammation and immune response is the response that starts happening in the body. And, so that’s what leaky gut is.

Again, leaky gut is when you have larger holes than should exist in your intestines and certain bad bacteria and food particles and things that aren’t digested get through. And, what really happens is imagine the small intestines while there’s serious inflammation there. So inflammation, if you sprain your ankle, if you ever get a big cut, and it gets red and swollen around the cut, that’s what’s happening in your intestines. They’re swelling, there is inflammation taking place and there’s chronic damage. So, that’s what happens.

Now, I want to go over the process of what happens in the body with leaky gut. So it starts with, first thing here, let’s say you eat poorly. What happens is that’s going to cause intestinal inflammation. So, you have inflammation of the gut lining. And then what happens after you have inflammation of the gut lining, over time that will cause the beginning stages of leaky gut. And then you typically might get something like nutrient malabsorption. Okay? So, that’s where you’re not absorbing certain vitamins and minerals properly, like vitamin B12, or magnesium or iron or zinc. So, if you have any vitamin mineral deficiency, that’s related to leaky gut. So that’s one of the first stages.

The next stage is an immune response. So, you have inflammation, you have damage to your intestinal lining. And then you get an immune response where your body starts attacking itself. And then what happens is you can start to develop GI issues, basic gas or bloating or inflammatory bowel disease. But, really any type of basic digestive issue. Acid reflux. Any of those in that category. And then you can get, again, food sensitivity. So, if you have any food sensitivity, maybe you’re gluten-intolerant or dairy-intolerant, that’s a warning sign you have leaky gut. And if those continue over time, it can then get to autoimmune disease. And, by the way, you may not show every stage of this. You may where you have intestinal inflammation, you have an immune response and an autoimmune disease. You may never notice or have been diagnosed with food sensitivities, but you actually probably have them. But then again, if leaky gut is not corrected and fixed early on or at some
point, it can then lead to autoimmune disease, where your body is actually attacking its own organs like the thyroid, like the adrenal glands, like the brain. You can get neurodegeneration. All of these things start to happen over time in the breakdown of the body.

So, again leaky gut is really the first stage. But, leaky gut can lead to numerous other health conditions, many of which I’ve talked about. But, some of the most common are gas and bloating and any minor digestive issue. Which I say “minor,” those can be a warning sign of something major developing. Food sensitivities, thyroid conditions, adrenal fatigue, joint pain, headaches. Any sort of skin issue like rosacea, psoriasis, even basic acne is a sign of leaky gut. Digestive problems, IBS, weight gain, syndrome X, even diabetes. All of those are leaky gut warning signs. And then I want to throw a few others out here. Migraine headaches, anxiety, depression, muscle pain, and then especially conditions such as autism, as well as ADHD, all of these conditions have been linked to leaky gut. And, then, of course, I mentioned autoimmune disease earlier, which really that’s in numerous conditions such as Hashimoto’s disease, Graves’ disease, rheumatoid arthritis, fibromyalgia, lupus. All of those conditions are in those categories. So, you can see that leaky gut is linked to and causes the majority of health conditions people may be experiencing today.

So, let me answer the next question. What causes leaky gut? Well, there are several factors. But, I want to paint a picture for you of really how it can start at birth. Let’s say you have a mom, she’s pregnant, and she isn’t healthy herself. In fact, she is probiotic deficient, she doesn’t have enough good bacteria in her gut. And we know that this is the case, especially if you look in America and Europe today. It’s very common for us to have less probiotics than other civilizations. For instance, I was recently reading studies not too long ago where they came across a tribe in Venezuela. And they found that that tribe had almost double the amount of probiotic or microbe species in their gut than we do. Think about that. Almost double the amount of probiotic or microdiversity than what we have. So, what we’re finding is that we are missing microbes. We’re missing specific strains and types of probiotics that actually help our immune system and our defense in overall digestion and keeping us from conditions like leaky gut.

So, again, some children, if the parent doesn’t have enough probiotics, those are not passed on to the child. And, what can happen is, well, if a child is born, let’s go to
the next phase, then, born through a C-section. They’re missing out on that probiotic or that microbe passing on, if you will, to the child. And, so, when that baby is born through the birth canal, that’s really their first exposure. And that bacteria are then released into their system. If they’re born through C-section and the parent didn’t have enough probiotics, that will leave them with a deficiency. And that’s our average child today.

Then let’s think about phase three what happens. How many kids are put on prescription antibiotic drugs? I call antibiotic drugs the A-bomb. Just like an atomic bomb can destroy the earth and it’s probably the most devastating thing that could happen to the earth, taking a prescription antibiotic medication is potentially the most devastating thing that can happen to somebody’s gut, as well as the probiotics in their gut and their immune system. So, antibiotic drugs at any point in life can be devastating to the health. So that’s really phase number three.

Phase number four is taking other medications and even NSAIDs, non-steroidal antiinflammatory drugs. Almost all of these medications and chemicals kill off probiotics.

Step five in this downward spiral of people experiencing and getting leaky gut has to do with a lack of probiotics in the diet. If you look at most cultures around the world, they had staple probiotic foods. You looked in Russia, in places like Bulgaria. You had yogurt and kefir. And, look in Germany, they had sauerkraut. You look in Africa, they had amasai. You look in India, they had lassi. You look at Japan, they had miso and natto. And, what do we have in America today and a lot of Europe it just . . . Yogurt might be the staple of the diet, but you know what? Yogurt is not the same yogurt that our parents consumed or our grandparents consume for many of us. And, so, again we are missing out on probiotic foods.

And, also we’re not connected to the earth and soil. We’re missing certain types of probiotics that are found in our soil today known as soil-based organisms. I believe I saw a study recently that in 1910, almost 50% of people were somehow in the farming industry. And, 1000 years ago, it was almost 80%. So, we’re talking about very high ratios. Today, it’s less than 2% of people are out there in the land getting their hands and body in the soil, eating fresh local food that contained probiotics. And then creating probiotics or so.
Another thing that’s happening is the creation of the refrigerator. In fact, probably one of the most devastating inventions ever because we stopped fermenting our foods, so we get less probiotics. That’s obviously another thing is the lack of probiotics in our diet and exposure on a daily basis has caused leaky gut.

The next thing would be all the inflammatory food we consume. So much of the food we consume today is not even food, actually. If you look, like, at a popular “snack cake,” everything in there is pretty much made in a lab. Or, maybe it was food at one point, but now it’s definitely not.

So, eating inflammatory food . . . I want to talk about some of the biggest food offenders that cause leaky gut. Number one is excess sugar. Now, here’s why sugar causes leaky gut. Is if you’re consuming sugar, it doesn’t kill probiotics, but it causes an imbalance of bacteria to where it causes yeast overgrowth. So, yeast and Candida start to overtake and actually crowd out and push out more important or other microbes or probiotics you should have in your system. It’s not that you shouldn’t have any yeast. You should have a little bit of yeast in your body, but when you have an overgrowth of yeast, that yeast actually will produce toxins in your body. And so for that reason, excess sugar intake is a major cause of leaky gut.

The next thing, I would say, from a food standpoint, would be dairy products, specifically casein that’s found in cow’s milk today. So again, cow’s milk and other major cause of leaky gut. Now, doing, like, a goat’s milk kefir and goat’s milk yogurt are absolutely okay for probably 90% percent of people, very healthy for them. But, again, the average casein found in dairy today in conventional milk, another major cause of leaky gut.

Another food cause of leaky gut are grains and specifically two things found in there, gluten and phytic acid. We know that gluten is probably from a compound standpoint might be up there. It’s either the number one or number two cause of leaky gut from a food standpoint. We see a lot of people today are already experiencing the benefits of going gluten-free. But, gluten is a major cause of leaky gut. And gluten is found primarily in wheat products today, as well as other grain products, such as barley and, in smaller amounts, in rye. But, again, barley, wheat, and rye contain gluten. And, wheat is found in the majority of packaged foods today.
And, then also phytic acid. Now, phytic acid is found in all grains, beans, and nuts and seeds. Now, I’m not telling you never to eat nuts and seeds and especially things like chia and flax. And getting a little bit of phytic acid in small amounts isn’t too bad. But, you can kill off phytic acid with preparing grains properly. If you want to know why Ezekiel bread is healthier than other bread, it’s because those grains have been sprouted, they’ve been soaked, which kills off the phytic acid. And, basically phytic acid, also lactones and gliadins, these are what are known as enzyme inhibitors or nutrient blockers that are found in grains. They essentially bind the minerals and they keep you from absorbing and digesting them.

Just to let you know, if you are consuming, let’s say, a flaxseed, you’re going to digest some nutrients, but definitely not all versus if you consume a sprouted flaxseed, you’re going to be able to consume and digest close to all of those minerals and nutrients in there. But phytates and lactones really keep you from absorbing and digesting those nutrients. So, again, that’s why grains are a major issue today. That’s why gluten is a problem. And they are very hard on the gut. They’re very hard to digest. And so grains and gluten are definitely related to leaky gut.

The next thing would be GMO foods. Genetically modified organisms have had pesticides, herbicides, different viruses are literally wired into their DNA. So if you’re consuming genetically modified foods, those have been shown to kill off probiotics and a few other things. Hydrogenated oils, canola oil, vegetable oils, any processed oils, those cause intestinal inflammation causing leaky gut. And, then, of course, chemicals in our food supply.

As I mentioned earlier, pesticides, herbicides. That’s why going organic and eating local is another great thing to do. And, so, those are some of the food causes of leaky gut that you definitely want to be staying away from. Now, I want to talk a little bit more about what happens in the body and how leaky gut can really affect your entire body.

As I mentioned earlier, leaky gut, it really starts in the gut. But there are other things related to leaky gut as well as we’re talking about causes. And, so, I wanted to talk about a few others. We talked about food. I also want to talk about stress and organ malfunction, okay? Now, I’ve talked about what causes leaky gut in a way, I covered most of it. But there are a few other things that you might not expect.
Emotional stress is one of the biggest factors that will cause leaky gut. And, I have been a big proponent of Chinese medicine and looking at the way Chinese medicine and emotions affect your health. In fact, there’s something I’ve studied called the five elements of Chinese medicine. And, they really have found that certain emotions you experience affect the gut. This is where, as part of this program, you see the Five Gut Types Diet. And, I’ve customized leaky gut programs that also support certain organs that might be causing your leaky gut.

For instance, if somebody has an issue with, let’s say, you experience unforgiveness, as well as frustration and anger. Those are some of the emotions you experience. According to Chinese medicine, we know that those emotions affect the liver and gallbladder. Now, if you’re a person who has liver and gallbladder issues . . . And let’s say you’ve even got to the point where you have your gallbladder removed, that then is going to give you a much greater chance of having leaky gut because now because you’ve had your gallbladder removed or, let’s say, not even if you’ve had that. So, that’s obviously a big case, but even if you just have an overtaxed liver, now your liver isn’t producing enough bile, and your gallbladder isn’t recycling enough bile, which bile is what breaks down fat. So, now your small intestine has to all the work to break down fat. So, now you’re overtaxing your small intestine, which will then give you leaky gut. So you can see just by experiencing emotions of unforgiveness, anger, and unforgiveness. If you have those emotions . . . . And I would say experiencing them on occasion is fine, but if you are overcome with those emotions, that then will affect the liver and gallbladder, that then will affect your small intestine, which will then cause leaky gut. You can see the vicious cycle of what happens in the body from leaky gut.

So, again, taking care of your emotions and stress is also critical. And part of it is leaky gut program, you’re going to find exact lifestyle and stress reduction techniques that you absolutely want to incorporate. And, last but not least, I mentioned organ malfunction.

Again, if you’ve had your gallbladder removed, your thyroid removed, if you’ve had some form of other surgery, those things can also increase your likelihood and can cause leaky gut over time. Now, one of the things I did mention earlier is some of the things that leaky gut is related to in terms of conditions. And, so, I just want run through those again. And, I do touch on these in our science and symptoms of leaky gut.
gut. But again, any of those issues especially . . . But food sensitivities, inflammatory bowel disease, autoimmune disease, thyroid problems, malabsorption, inflammatory skin conditions, mood issues, those are all warning signs somebody has leaky gut. And, what you want to do now is start taking steps to fix leaky gut as soon as possible. That’s what this healing leaky gut program is all about.

And so again, you want to start by changing your diet. You want to start by removing the triggers, taking care of your lifestyle. And, I want to encourage you to move on now and check out our healing leaky gut types or specific to your gut type, taking that quiz and figuring out what you need to do now and next steps to start healing leaky gut. So, again, remember, leaky gut is essentially, in the medical literature, it’s intestinal permeability. And it’s when your net, your intestinal lining becomes inflamed, your tight junctions become damaged. So then now foods like gluten and bad bacteria leak into your bloodstream, which causes an autoimmune and inflammatory reaction. That’s what leaky gut is. It’s the root cause of all disease. Now it’s time to start fixing it and repairing it. I want to say, guys, I’m so excited for you to take this journey in healing leaky gut.