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Improve Gut Health with Plants

Many of us are in a routine of selecting the same groceries every week and eating many of the same foods. The concept of regularly trying out new foods seems like a thing of our childhood that we don't often practice anymore. But introducing new plant foods into our diet helps nurture a healthy gut microbiome, the collection of microbes (bacteria, fungi and viruses) in our large intestine. Our health and our immune system are dependent on us having more of the beneficial type of microbes! According to the **American Gut Project**, consuming thirty or more different plant foods a week increases the diversity of the microbiome. A diverse microbiome also improves gut health and function and is associated with better overall health. Eating thirty different plant foods a week may feel like a lofty goal and increasing fiber intake too quickly can cause some discomfort (e.g., gas and bloating), so make sure you **start low and go slow**.

Tips for Trying New Plant Foods

- Remember that plant foods extend beyond fruits and vegetables. Explore a variety of nuts, seeds, grains, beans, oils and herbs.
- Spend a little time researching and exploring fun ways to prepare new plant foods in ways appealing to you.
- Make some simple swaps to get started. Take your favorite recipes and see if there is an opportunity to substitute plant foods for some ingredients. Some easy substitutions include:
 - Tofu or beans instead of meat
 - Soy, almond or coconut milk instead of animal milk
 - Spaghetti squash instead of pasta
 - Cauliflower rice instead of grain rice
 - Dried apples or dried kale instead of potato chips
 - Olive or avocado oil instead of butter or margarine

Less Commonly Eaten Plant Foods to Try

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| • Quinoa | • Chickpeas |
| • Kumquat | • Edamame |
| • Ground flaxseed | • Tahini |
| • Starfruit | • Jicama |
| • Jackfruit | • Golden kiwi |
| • Chia seeds | • Bok choy |
| • Fava beans | • White beans |
| • Fresh mint | • Cassava |



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