

DR. GEORGE RUSSELL'S NEWSLETTER: MEET YOUR GUT!



Hey! You Staring At My Gut?

Listen! Researchers... are seriously into your gut. And into its indwelling population of 500 different species, some of which may constitute a whole new animal kingdom.

Regrettably, the length of this newsletter won't allow for individual introductions to the 100 trillion beings that call you Home. But let's get a jumpstart.

3 Paragraphs, 100 years: This American Health

Grace Crawford, my high school Latin teacher, was orphaned at age eleven. The influenza epidemic of 1918-20 killed her family, siblings, parents and some relatives, as well as 3 to 5 percent of the world's 1920 population. By comparison, World War II, the deadliest war in history, killed the same percent

of the 1940 world's population - but half of them died from short-term diseases resulting from war. Advances in science - including, but certainly not limited to, the influenza vaccine -- make the likelihood of a flu epidemic of that scale (including wartime disease deaths from bacteria and viruses) unlikely in 2016 (at least in the First World).

The 20th century belief that medical science would soon cure all our ills (in the 60's, "better living through chemistry" wasn't a joke), led to huge changes in American lifestyles and our ideas of health. At the end of the 20th century, though, we came to face longer-term illnesses hard to control and eliminate with quick courses of medication or operations. You know the names of these diseases, and you know most of what you "should do". Preventing or improving disease and poor health requires behavior change as much or more than medical intervention. And it takes initiative to find information and build strategies. When you're holding the refrigerator door handle, you are your own case manager. And without support it's very hard to oversee yourself.

Like a player in a video game where the avatar is you, you need to seek health resources and avoid enemies. Most of the enemies are familiar to you, like a set of fun but ultimately chronically-fatiguing friends you sometimes meet for drinks in the Village. Poor genetics, sugar, inflammation, processed, cured and smoked foods, impure water and air, lack of activity, sitting, poverty, oppression and depression are all factors in ill-health. There are many more complex and interconnected causes of malaise and death. Many are out of your control, but your gut and the food you eat are generally in your control.

Presenting - Your Gut

It's Interesting. For one thing, the gut is not really "you". The gut is a part of the outside world that tunnels through your body and through which things you eat pass. Physiologically, it is on the outside of your body, but the membranes that touch it vary in permeability; the body secretes chemicals into it and takes in chemicals from it, affecting us in the most fundamental way.

Many of us believe in higher powers that can heal and guide us, if we listen and do what they tell us. I can introduce you to several trillion of of them now. They are creatures that live in our guts. These guest workers have found lovely ways to make themselves useful; some have even become essential to us (they help digest our food and create many beneficial chemicals for us). Some of these

critters are parasites (which is kinda like when I stopped in to visit my friend Carol for a week and ended up sleeping in her guest room for several years, eating her food, and leaving the refrigerator door open so the milk went bad and gave everyone food poisoning). Under less than optimal conditions, our bacteria can produce acids from your food that don't just damage the digestive tract but also allow poison chemicals into your bloodstream.

Garbage In, Garbage Out "When Good Bacteria Go Bad"

Because the gut is physiologically distinct from the body, and yet part of you, taking care of it is a little like taking care of your own private aquarium and farm. And - feel free to cry or wail, it's not unmanly - some of the most appealing and addictive foods that you are eating are not ones you would ever sprinkle on your fish's aquarium. What's worse it's not just that you're feeding the parasites; recent research suggests that even your good organisms can either die or "turn on you" and start hurting you if you eat poorly.

It's theoretically possible that you bear a tiny bit of responsibility for your difficulties, since you're usually the one choosing the foods you eat (unless you're sleeping at Carol's and rifling the cabinets at night like I did). Changing your nutrition can be a great help in getting gut religion again. As in many other areas of health, we are coming to understand that each person's physiology and neurology are different and of course, each of us has a unique relationship to food that needs to be understood and taken into account as we devise and implement health strategies.

"I'm Not Sure How To Say This... Get Help!"

Health coaches are a great resource. A practitioner has perspective on

- the body (multiple systems, shifting physiology, unique bodies),
- the person (looking at the whole you that you never see - history, habit, attitude, environment and so on.
- food (different types of food and how to find/buy/cook them, energetic/systemic effects of food - will help you most.

A characteristic of coaches is that they accept, endorse and encourage you. (If they don't, fire them and find another.) With help, information and support, you're likely to improve your health no matter what.

Enter Rylan Brown

This January, I talked to a coach, Rylan Brown. (freedomthrufood.com)

George Russell: Rylan, don't you think it's funny that we're pretending we're talking, when we really did this all on email?

Rylan Brown: I'll call you back.

GR: Can you tell us about the relationship of the gut to health and the field of nutrition?

Rylan Brown: I believe gut problems are the source of every major disease, and as you are thinking, it's the American diet that causes the problems. Processed GMO foods, sugar, chemicals in our food, exposure to fluorine in city water, and food (even some organic food) that's nutrient-poor due to over-farming the soil without crop rotation.

GR: So it's a social and political issue as well as a personal behavior one - but that's for another interview! How do I get started with improving my diet?

RB: You can start when you get home. Open the cupboards and purge them of processed foods.

GR: OK, you're asking me to throw out the Spam®... (crying is not unmanly), and watch myself trying to sneak the colored mini-marshmallows back onto the shelf?

RB: Yes. Change is inevitable - but it happens over time. Taking out processed food gets you started on the road to simple-ingredient, whole food meals that you may end up enjoying more than Spam®.

GR (To myself): [More than colored mini-marshmallows?]

RB: Balance and mindfulness are important. You don't change everything at once.

GR: [Wait, can he hear my thoughts?]

RB: Fermented foods -- for example sauerkraut, and also organic miso, aged at least 1 year, are powerful gut transformers. [GR: There's a list of useful

fermented foods below.]

RB: We need proper magnesium supplements to balance all that we are losing from fluoride exposure in our water. [GR: Take a look at these magnesium supplements. FYI, I recommend any brand of epsom salts, but the spray magnesium is special]:

spray magnesium epsom salt

RB: I have learned that supplementing good bacteria can throw the bacterial population in the gut even further off balance, however, so we have to be careful with supplementing in general.

GR: Do you use supplements? What are your thoughts about when and how to do it?

RB: The best treatment is food. In my experience, clients who supplement seldom get results until they make fundamental changes in their diets, at which point most supplements aren't needed.

I'm not an expert on herbs or supplements by any means. Still, my belief is that when we try to introduce vitamins and minerals into our bodies by taking pills and capsules, or bodies just don't absorb or utilize them as effectively as when they come as part of a whole food.

GR: You told me that the nutritional quality of, for example, GMO foods is poor, and that even some "organic" food isn't as nourishing as it was in the past. How can a shopper evaluate the authenticity and nutritional value of foods touted as "organic"?

RB: Nutritional value and organic still go hand and hand. But processed foods labeled "organic" often have sugar and other strange ingredients in them. The idea is to eat whole foods, cutting out anything that's processed. It's important for people to remember that companies have an interest in portraying their food as "good quality", "all natural".

Take Trader Joe's. They have a good reputation, but they use the same bulk commodity non-organic ingredients to make their food as any other company does. If it doesn't have the USDA stamp "organic" on it, or if the barcode on a fruit or vegetable doesn't start with a 9 or 6, it's not organic. One exception to this rule is small local farms. It is - as it should be - difficult for a new or small

farm to get the organic imprint, so many farmers in the New York area, for example, may be growing food organically but they either can't afford to get certification or they are using less harmful pesticides than large commercial farms and are thus better even though they aren't strictly organic. So when you go to the farmer's market, talk to the farmers. Ask questions, and get answers, directly from them. Food harvested yesterday or this morning has more vital energy and nutrition than anything else. If the employees don't know where the food came from or how it was grown, that may (or may not) be a cue that the farm isn't so small or so organic.

GR: Are there any practical books you recommend to help people get good guts? *[GR: My recommended list of gut literature is at the bottom of this newsletter]*

RB: For a client, what you read depends on whether you have a specific issue or complaint that we are working on. If you're just trying to get healthier, The Clean Program by Alejandro Junger is a solid book and program. I find only a few holes in his process, one of the biggest being application and execution.

GR: Well, I guess that's where a health coach is what we need. What happens in a consultation?

RB: Well, I can only speak for myself. As in any profession, the approach of a health coach varies a lot from person to person. But the general process is similar. I get to know you, what you eat, your current state of health, and what your goals are. Then I talk to you about what kind of actions and new habits can impact your life most quickly and efficiently for the better.

I work with a mixed bunch of clients. I'm currently spending much of my time preparing food for people -- specialized diets for cancer, gut issues, diabetes, and so on. My specialty is food energetics - how various foods create inflammation or healing in the body. Each food offers an inherent "energetic resonance", a quality that you bring into you when you eat it, depending, for example, on the climate that it grows in and if it grows above or below the ground. Knowing a little bit about how various foods affect your organ systems can help you get to the next level by giving you a more concrete sense of what's holding you back physiologically, and the direct connection between your difficulties and your habits - especially your diet. I also teach cooking classes.

I also use visual diagnosis, which is a primarily Eastern technique that you may

have observed at the acupuncturist's office. In visual diagnosis, I correlate details on the face and body to give me a sense of the way the organ systems are operating, how they're stressed, and what foods the client could eat to rebalance and de-stress their organ systems. A big part of my job is helping clients create a structured plan and introduce the right habits into their lives over a manageable period of time - it needs to not be overwhelming.

I do grocery store trips - for example, I walk through Whole Foods with a client or a group and help people to navigate changing their ways.

I work with an organic chemist who looks deeper into bloodwork than most MD's. The internal relationships between the numbers in your bloodwork, not just their absolute levels, can show me a lot about how food is affecting your body's energetics for better or worse.

GR: I can see that you really get to the nuts and bolts of lifestyle change. You don't just tell them what to do and send them out the door.

RB: Lifestyle change is the hardest, and the most important thing in improving health. The medical/pharmaceutical industry, and the food industry, have a vested interest in keeping people sick, dependent on pharmaceuticals and surgery, and addicted to processed food. And most people don't or can't make even the basic changes that are suggested to them even when they have information. Clearly that's the central problem in nutritional (or any health-related) counseling.

GR: From listening to my clients (and the inside of my head), it's definitely the biggest problem. I mean, people know lots of stuff they should do, but many feel they just can't do it.

RB: Yes. Basically, the gut, and therefore, the person with health problems, is ravaged from so many angles in our culture. From food to beverages to fluoridated city water. I try to help people eliminate the main markers causing the inflammation. I am not a western style nutritionist. I look at food energetics from an eastern perspective. Since I am a personal chef, I bring a "practical execution" side to my work that people find rare. My long-term goal is to find and create streamlined educational platforms to help people make knowledge and practice come together.

[Editor's Note: Take a look at this free app to help you in the grocery store!

Ingredient1]

GR: And it seems often that the people who need to change their diets the most have the hardest time doing it, maybe because they already feel so bad that they don't want to give up their food pleasures.

RB: Changing your habits and life especially around food is so difficult for people because there is so much psychology and emotion attached to it.

As the saying goes, "We are what we eat, and we eat what we are!" And, in case you didn't believe it, food addiction is absolutely real! You have to make an effort to change any habit (habit means that you're not aware when you are doing something), and clients need to be willing to put in the work and time. I help them manage this the best I can but some people are just not ready. They are literally addicted to their way of life. I have the most success with clients who have hit a bottom (in some cases, they have developed a disease) and are suddenly completely unwilling to continue living the way they have been. People who are completely stressed out have such a hard time making change. My first job is to help them manage their stress and give them digestible routines to get into.

GR: Well, a lot of the people who will read this are pretty motivated. Do you have different diets that you put people on, or is there a basic diet that you recommend for everyone?

RB: Different people, with different problems, certainly have different needs. But I have a standard elimination phase in the beginning for most people. The menus and recipes I offer range from Mediterranean to Asian and Indian flavors. The food is surprisingly varied and tasty.

Rylan Brown is a Certified Health Coach and a graduate of The institute for Integrative Nutrition and Macro America. His personal work in nutrition started when he healed himself from chronic headaches and anxiety by changing the food he ate. A major inspiration for Rylan is his mother Debra Reich, who has been cooking healthy food for people for 30 years. Debra's website Rylan worked in his mother's kitchen as her apprentice for two years. For more information on healthy eating or to reach Rylan Brown, go to his website, [here](#).

Fermented Foods for a Harmonious Gut

According to [Rylan Brown](#), a fermented food needs to have active probiotics in it to directly improve gut function. Here's a list of some fermented foods with notes.

Pu-erh tea is a fermented tea which you can't overbrew. It has a smoky taste that's distinctive and its "pick-me-up" effect is milder and lasts longer than coffee. Tea has many positive effects and is well worth drinking, but active probiotics are not present in tea.

Chocolate, coffee, wine, beer. These are for enjoyment, etc. They don't provide probiotics and you are no doubt aware of their benefits and their dangers!

Sourdough bread. Whole wheat or part whole wheat from a bakery that only uses sourdough starter (no added yeast) is best. Bread Alone's sourdough is widely available in the city.

Cultured milk products (kefir, cheese, yogurt, etc.) are good, but Rylan doesn't recommend them as a meal replacement.

Cultured butter. A much better alternative to butter that has good quality saturated fat. Olive oil, though not probiotic, is still a better idea than any kind of butter.

Vinegar. Some vinegars are beneficial, and some are harmful to the liver. Many people swear by apple cider vinegar and consider it a health panacea when taken daily. According to Rylan, it's great to use occasionally, e.g. when you feel a cold coming on, but Rylan doesn't recommend it for daily use.

Sauerkraut and Kimchi are the best sources of live probiotics in a food context.

Miso, if fermented for at least one year, is also an excellent source of live probiotics as food.

Kombucha is a good probiotic provider.

Pickles of all kinds help your gut. If you can get salt brined and naturally lacto-fermented pickles, so much the better. If they're pickled in distilled vinegar, the benefits are less.

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