The gut is both strong and delicate at the same time. Over time, we’re learning more about positive lifestyle choices and those that can weaken the gut’s defences. Here are ten things in your environment or your lifestyle choices that might affect how well your gut performs:

1. Maintain a healthy weight. In obese people, the gut microbiome is less diverse[[1]](#endnote-1)
2. Reduce your consumption of sugar, artificial preservatives, and processed foods[[2]](#endnote-2)
3. Eat less red meat and high-fat foods[[3]](#endnote-3)
4. Don’t excessively use hand sanitizers[[4]](#endnote-4)
5. According to researchers, moderate the use of over-the-counter painkillers for aches and pains: a common side effect of long-term dosing of certain painkiller therapies (e.g. naproxen and ibuprofen) is gastric ulcers and a condition called leaky gut (when toxic bacteria and food proteins leak into your bloodstream through your gut wall, causing your immune system to attack the invader)[[5]](#endnote-5), [[6]](#endnote-6)
6. Use natural alternatives to harsh chemicals for lighter cleaning jobs (such as vinegar or lemon juice)[[7]](#endnote-7)
7. Studies recommend not to overuse antibiotics (research has shown that it can take up to a year for some gut bacteria to recover from a course of antibiotics)12,[[8]](#endnote-8)
8. Don’t smoke! Smoking isn’t just bad for your lungs and your heart; it can affect the healthy balance of microorganisms in your gut. A study in Switzerland found that after people in the study stopped smoking, there were profound changes in the diversity of gut microorganisms.[[9]](#endnote-9)
9. Avoid stress. Prolonged stress can alter the balance of bacteria that live in your intestines, leading to immune system problems. This can contribute to Irritable bowel syndrome (IBS), which can cause cramping, abdominal pain, bloating, gas, diarrhoea and constipation.[[10]](#endnote-10)
10. Don’t lose sleep. A number of gastrointestinal functions are regulated by circadian rhythms (also known as your sleep/wake cycle or body clock). These functions include gastric acid production and small intestinal nutrient absorption.[[11]](#endnote-11)

Strengthen your gut by participating in *The Gutsy Challenge* and get started <for your chance to win>! <Visit XX to pick up your copy of the challenge materials.>

1. Molecular Metabolism, “A healthy gastrointestinal microbiome is dependent on dietary diversity,” May 2016 [↑](#endnote-ref-1)
2. Nutrients, “Diet-Induced Dysbiosis of the Intestinal Microbiota and the Effects on Immunity and Disease,” August 2012 [↑](#endnote-ref-2)
3. National Institutes of Health, “Red Meat-Heart Disease Link Involves Gut Microbes,” April 2013 [↑](#endnote-ref-3)
4. Cell, ‘Variation in Microbiome LPS Immunogenicity Contributes to Autoimmunity in Humans’, April 2016 [↑](#endnote-ref-4)
5. Clinical Reviews in Allergy & Immunology, “Leaky gut and autoimmune diseases,” February 2012 [↑](#endnote-ref-5)
6. Always consult a physician before changing medicine intake. [↑](#endnote-ref-6)
7. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, ‘Updated Norovirus Outbreak Management and Disease Prevention Guidelines’, March 2011 [↑](#endnote-ref-7)
8. www.gov.uk, “European Antibiotic Awareness Day: evaluations,” June 2014 [↑](#endnote-ref-8)
9. Inflammatory Bowel Disease, “Smoking cessation induces profound changes in the composition of the intestinal microbiota in humans,” 2014 [↑](#endnote-ref-9)
10. Trends in Neurosciences, “Gut–brain axis: how the microbiome influences anxiety and depression,” May 2013 [↑](#endnote-ref-10)
11. European Journal of Neuroscience, “Novel biochemical manipulation of brain serotonin reveals a role of serotonin in the circadian rhythm of sleep–wake cycles,” May 2012 [↑](#endnote-ref-11)