

GAPS Diet Plan & Protocol for Solving Gut Issues + More

It's undeniable that there is an intricate connection between your gut microbiome and overall health. Made up of trillions of microorganisms, increasing research [shows](#) that the health of your gut flora is thought to have a massive influence on health and disease.

Improving the composition of your gut microbiome is the main concept behind the GAPS diet, a therapeutic diet focused on healing leaky gut syndrome, reducing inflammation and even treating certain neurological conditions.

The plan removes refined carbohydrates and foods that are difficult to digest and swaps in foods rich in probiotics and nutrients to help give your gut health an upgrade.

So if you're wondering how to heal [leaky gut syndrome](#) and give your digestive health a boost, keep reading for what you need to know about this innovative diet.

What Is the GAPS Diet?

The Gut and Psychology Syndrome Diet, also known as the GAPS diet, is a therapeutic diet commonly used in the treatment of inflammatory bowel disease, leaky gut syndrome, autism, ADHD, depression, anxiety and autoimmune disease.

The diet was originally inspired by the Specific Carbohydrate Diet (SCD diet), which was developed by Dr. Sidney Valentine Haas in the 1920s to help treat digestive disorders. In 2004, Dr. Natasha Campbell published the GAPS diet book, *Gut and Psychology Syndrome*, which outlined the details of this groundbreaking diet.

Grains, starchy vegetables and refined carbohydrates are all eliminated from the diet and replaced with nutrient-dense foods that are easy to digest.

The GAPS diet meal plan is introduced in six stages, with the GAPS diet stage one being the most restrictive. As the diet progresses, more and more foods are added back onto the GAPS diet food list.

Because it emphasises nutrient-rich foods and eliminates several food groups that may not be so stellar for digestion, many have seen success with the plan in both improving gut health and treating various ailments.

However, there is limited research on the benefits of the GAPS diet itself and, although it's clear that gut health plays a major role in many aspects of health, it's unclear just how far-reaching the benefits of this diet may be. Still, despite a lack of research on the diet specifically, there are plenty of existing studies looking at many of its individual components and demonstrating that this diet may come with a whole host of health benefits.

Benefits

1. May Help Improve Symptoms of Autism

Autism is a developmental disorder that begins in early childhood and results in impaired communication and interaction with others. Although the GAPS

diet is claimed to help improve symptoms of autism, there is still a lack of research looking at the connection between the GAPS diet and autism.

However, several studies have found that certain dietary modifications that are included in the GAPS diet could help decrease autism symptoms.

Eliminating gluten, in particular, has been shown to have a favourable effect on autism.

One 2016 study [compared](#) the effects of a gluten-free diet to a regular diet in 80 children with autism and found that a [gluten-free diet](#) was effective in controlling autism behaviours and gastrointestinal symptoms. Another small study in 2017 [showed](#) that a gluten-free, casein-free diet helped reduce symptoms in children with autism.

Still, more research is needed on the GAPS diet specifically to measure its potential effectiveness.

2. Could Improve Blood Sugar

The GAPS diet eliminates foods like grains, starchy vegetables and refined carbohydrates, all of which are common culprits when it comes to high blood sugar. These foods are high in carbohydrates, which are broken down quickly into sugar in the bloodstream.

Although there is no research focused specifically on the effect of the GAPS diet on blood sugar, there are plenty of studies showing that moderating your intake of carbohydrates can have a big impact when it comes to maintaining normal blood sugar. One study, for instance, [found](#) that a low-carb, high-protein diet helped improve blood sugar control in those with type 2 diabetes.

Conversely, a review in the *Journal of the American College of Nutrition* **reported** that higher intake of refined carbs is associated with a greater risk of developing diabetes.

Despite these promising results, more studies are needed to specifically look at the effects of the GAPS diet on blood sugar.

3. Boosts Immune Health

The gut microbiome is a massive ecosystem made up of trillions of microorganisms living right in your digestive system. The health of your gut microbiome can have a big influence on your overall health and may even impact your immune system.

The GAPS diet emphasises a diet rich in fermented foods and probiotics, both of which can increase the amount of beneficial bacteria in your gut.

These beneficial gut bacteria are believed to communicate with the cells of the immune system, which can alter and **improve** the way that your body responds to disease and infection and **promote** enhanced immunity.

4. May Reduce Inflammation

While inflammation may be a normal immune response by the body, chronic inflammation is **linked** to many types of chronic disease, including cancer, heart disease and diabetes. Inflammation is also a key component of digestive disorders like inflammatory bowel disease (IBD) and Crohn's disease.

The GAPS diet includes many anti-inflammatory foods, such as antioxidant-rich vegetables, heart-healthy fats and fish. It also emphasises fermented foods, which are high in probiotics. Some research has **suggested** that probiotics could exert an anti-inflammatory effect in the body.

Thanks to its beneficial effects on inflammation, this diet may also aid in the treatment of leaky gut syndrome. In fact, the GAPS diet is sometimes called the leaky gut diet because it may be able to decrease intestinal permeability, or leaky gut.

Several studies have [shown](#) that increased intestinal permeability may be [associated](#) with underlying inflammation. Reducing this inflammation by making dietary modifications can be an effective way to prevent the signs and symptoms of leaky gut, such as food sensitivities, malabsorption and inflammatory skin conditions.

5. Could Prevent Depression

Although there are no studies on the effects of the GAP diet itself on depression, there is plenty of research demonstrating that improving the health of your gut may have a significant impact on your mental health.

A 2017 review of 10 studies [found](#) that probiotic supplementation may be effective in reducing symptoms of depression. Another study in the journal *Gastroenterology* [showed](#) that a specific strain of probiotics was associated with decreased depressive symptoms and an improved quality of life in 44 patients with irritable bowel syndrome.

Other aspects of your diet may also play a role in depression. One study in the *American Journal of Clinical Nutrition*, for instance, [found](#) that a higher intake of refined grains — which are eliminated on the GAPS diet — was associated with a higher risk of depression. Meanwhile, certain foods that are included on the diet, such as fruits and vegetables, were associated with a decreased risk.

GAPS Diet Food List

On the GAPS diet, refined carbohydrates, starchy vegetables and grains are nixed while easily-digestible non-starchy vegetables, meat, fish and heart-healthy fats take centre stage. Here is the full GAPS diet food list for you to take with you on your next trip to the supermarket:

Vegetables

- Artichoke
- Asparagus
- Avocados
- Beets
- Bok choy
- Broccoli
- Brussels sprouts
- Cabbage
- Capsicum
- Carrots
- Celery
- Collard greens
- Cucumbers
- Eggplant
- Fennel
- Garlic
- Green beans
- Jerusalem artichoke
- Kale
- Mushrooms

- Olives
- Onions
- Parsnip
- Pumpkin
- Radish
- Rocket
- Romaine lettuce
- Seaweed
- Spinach
- Tomatoes
- Turnips
- Watercress

Fish (wild-caught only, NO farm-raised)

- Anchovies
- Bass
- Cod
- Grouper
- Haddock
- Halibut
- Herring
- Mackerel
- Mahi mahi
- Red snapper
- Salmon
- Sardines
- Seabass
- Trout

- Tuna
- Walleye

Nuts and legumes (ideally sprouted or as nut butters)

- Almonds (sprouted or as raw nut butter)
- Brazil nuts
- Coconut
- Hazelnuts
- Lima beans (soaked)
- Macadamia
- Navy beans (soaked)
- Pecans
- Pine nuts
- Walnuts
- Nut butters
- Nut flours (in moderate amounts – no more than 1/4 cup a day)

Fat/oils (organic & unrefined)

- Avocado oil
- Almond oil
- Butter
- Coconut oil
- Flaxseed oil
- Ghee
- Hemp Seed oil
- Macadamia oil
- Olive oil
- Sesame oil

- Palm oil (sustainable)
- Walnut oil

Dairy (raw, aged and grass-fed)

- Goat cheese (aged 60+ days)
- Kefir (cultured goat milk) (fermented 24+ hours)
- Raw sheep cheese (aged 60+ days)
- Sheep yogurt (fermented 24+ hours)
- Raw cows cheese (aged 60+ days)
- Raw cows amasai, kefir and yogurt (fermented 24+ hours)

Meat (organic, grass-fed)

- Beef
- Bison
- Bone broth
- Chicken
- Duck
- Eggs (free-range)
- Lamb
- Turkey
- Quail and other wild game
- Venison and other wild game

Fruits (in moderation)

- Apple
- Apricot
- Banana
- Berries
- Blueberries

- Cantaloupe
- Cherries
- Coconuts
- Figs
- Grapefruit
- Grapes
- Kiwifruit
- Lemon
- Lime
- Mango
- Nectarine
- Orange
- Papaya
- Peaches
- Pears
- Pineapple
- Plums
- Pomegranate
- Raspberries
- Rhubarb
- Strawberries
- Watermelon (no seeds)

Spices & herbs

- Basil
- Black pepper
- Coriander
- Coriander seeds

- Cinnamon
- Cumin
- Dill
- Fennel
- Garlic
- Ginger
- Mint
- Parsley
- Peppermint
- Rosemary
- Sage
- Sea salt
- Tarragon
- Thyme
- Turmeric

Condiments

- Apple cider vinegar
- Coconut vinegar
- Sea salt

Flours

- Coconut flour
- Almond flour

Beverages

- Almond milk
- Coconut kefir
- Coconut milk

- Herbal teas
- Raw vegetable juices like celery juice
- Sparkling water
- Spring water (or filtered)
- Wine, in moderation

Sweeteners (in moderation)

- Raw honey
- Dates made into paste

Supplements (if recommended by your health practitioner)

- Digestive enzymes
- Fish oil or fermented cod liver oil
- L-Glutamine powder

Diet Plan

When starting the GAPS diet, it's recommended to start with a GAPS intro diet, which is divided into six stages. Foods are then slowly re-introduced over a period of 3–6 weeks.

As you enter a new stage, be sure to introduce just one new food at a time to monitor your tolerance. If you find that your body reacts negatively to a certain food, you may want to hold off on adding that food back into your diet for a few more weeks.

By the end of the intro diet, meat, fish, vegetables, fermented foods and eggs should make up the majority of your meals.

Stage 1

- beef, boiled in water or simmered in broth
- bok choy, cooked
- broccoli, cooked, no stalks
- carrots, cooked
- cauliflower, cooked, no stalks
- chicken, boiled in water or simmered in broth
- collard greens, cooked
- eggplant, peeled, cooked
- fermented vegetable juice, 1 teaspoon with meals
- fish, boiled in water or simmered in broth
- garlic, cooked
- ginger root
- raw honey
- kale, cooked
- animal fat (chicken)
- lamb, boiled in water or simmered in broth
- onions, cooked
- poultry: duck, turkey, and quail boiled in water or simmered in broth
- pumpkin, cooked (fresh, not canned)
- sea salt
- spinach, cooked
- tea (chamomile, ginger or mint)
- turkey, boiled in water or simmered in broth
- turnips, cooked
- yoghurt, homemade, fermented 24+ hours (start slow 1 tablespoon daily)
- zucchini, cooked

Stage 2

All foods from stage 1, and:

- raw egg yolks (pastured/organic)
- ghee (slowly introduce)
- coconut oil (introduce gradually because it is strongly anti-microbial)
- avocado

Stage 3

All foods from stage 2, and:

- nut butter (raw and sprouted)
- almond flour (1/4 cup maximum)
- coconut flour (1/4 cup maximum)
- fermented vegetables (sauerkraut)
- asparagus, cooked
- cabbage cooked
- celery, cooked
- fresh herbs, cooked

Stage 4

All foods from stage 3, and:

- carrot juice
- grilled and roasted meats
- herbs, dried
- extra virgin olive oil

Stage 5

All foods from stage 4, and:

- applesauce, homemade
- pear sauce, homemade
- cucumber, peeled
- mangoes
- dried herbs
- tomatoes
- vegetable juices

Stage 6

All foods from stage 5, and:

- apple, raw
- berries
- banana
- cherries
- coconut
- coconut milk
- dates
- kiwifruit
- peaches
- pears
- pineapple
- raspberries

Precautions

The GAPS diet may not be suitable for everyone. For example, those on a vegetarian or vegan diet may not be able to meet their nutrient needs as the GAPS diet food list is based heavily on animal products.

Additionally, the diet is not intended to replace traditional treatment for conditions like digestive disorders, autism or depression. Use the GAPS diet to improve your gut health but also follow the advice of a trusted healthcare practitioner if you suffer from any of these conditions.

During the first phases of the diet, be sure to introduce new foods slowly and add them back in one at a time to assess your tolerance. If foods are not well-tolerated, hold off on adding them back into your diet to prevent adverse side effects.

Finally, be sure to pair this diet with other key components of a healthy lifestyle like regular physical activity, a routine sleep schedule and minimal stress levels to help optimise your results.

Final Thoughts

- The GAPS diet plan is aimed at reducing inflammation, treating certain neurological conditions and healing the gut by improving the health of the digestive system.
- The diet plan removes grains, starchy vegetables and refined carbohydrates and replaces them with nutrient-dense foods that are easy to digest.
- The plan is divided into six phases; foods on the GAPS diet food list should be slowly introduced and assessed for tolerance.

- Although there is limited research on the effects of the GAPS diet specifically, improving gut health through the diet has been linked to a number of potential health benefits.
- Studies show that following a similar eating pattern could help reduce blood sugar, reduce the risk of depression, decrease symptoms of autism, enhance immune health and alleviate inflammation.