

Crohn's Disease and Diet Study: Our Results

We are excited to report findings from our Crohn's disease and diet study with you. The results have been very interesting to us. We have published the results in two medical journals and are working on another paper now.

We discuss our main findings below.

First Finding

We found people in the study had lower intakes of several nutrients compared to the average Canadian even though they ate about the same amount of food.

Some things that were especially low were:

- Nutrients found in healthy fats like olive oil, nuts and seeds, and fish.
- Nutrients found in protein rich foods like milk products, meat, and legumes such as beans, chickpeas and lentils.
- Vitamin C and potassium found in foods like bananas, oranges and potatoes.

The healthiness score of the diets eaten by people in our study rated about a 3.5/10. This means if people in the study would have scored 35% if it was a test.

Take action:

- Enjoy nuts, seeds or nut butters at least five times a week. A serving of nuts is ¼ cup. A serving of nut butter is 2 Tbsp.
- Try to include protein rich foods at all meals and snacks. Enjoying a variety of proteins can help make sure you are getting different types of nutrients.
- Eat potassium rich foods every day. Oranges, cantaloupe, potatoes, tomatoes and kiwi are great choices because they are also high in Vitamin C.

Second Finding

After finding study participants' diets were low in some nutrients, we wanted to see what foods, vitamins or minerals made a difference in health.

We found that some foods lowered inflammation in the intestines and in the blood.

- Dark green, leafy veggies like romaine lettuce, spinach, kale and swiss chard.
- Healthy fats like those found in extra-virgin olive oil and fish.
- Eating more fish and eating less red meat and processed meat.

Take action:

- Eat at least 1 cup of dark, leafy veggies each day. Try them in salads, stir fry, soup or even smoothies!
- Aim to eat 1-4 tbsp (15-60 ml) of extra-virgin olive oil each day. Use olive oil as your main oil for cooking, baking, making dressings and sauces.
- Limit red meat to less than 150-200 g a week or less than 2-3 decks of cards a week. Choose white meats like chicken or turkey more often. See the third finding to find out about eating more fish.
- Eat processed meat less than once a month. Processed meats include sausages, bacon, ham and deli meat. If choosing processed meat choose the "natural" brands that include celery salt.

Third Finding

Next, we explored how specific foods affected the bacteria in the gut. We think if people have more “helpful” bacteria than “unhelpful” bacteria they will also have less inflammation.

We found people eating more of these foods had more “helpful” bacteria.

- Fruits and vegetables
- Whole grains
- Fish
- Less red and processed meat

When people who had low scores on their diet test ate more of these items, their bacteria changed to the more helpful types.

We aren't quite sure yet how these bacteria affect Crohn's disease and want to do more research to study this.

Take action:

- Eat at least three, ½ cup servings of fruit each day. Choose whole fruit over fruit juice to get more fibre.
- Eat four or more ½ cup servings of vegetables every day. Try to have at least 2 of these servings as raw or leafy green vegetables. A good guide is to fill half of your plate with vegetables.
- Choose whole grains foods more often. These are foods like brown rice, quinoa, whole wheat bread or whole wheat pasta.
- Enjoy fish more often. We suggest two 100-gram servings a week. This is the same as eating fish twice a week that is the size of a deck of cards. Fatty fish like salmon, trout, herring and sardines are the best options.

Summary

We were excited to find that what you eat can help change how healthy your gut is. Getting enough vitamins and minerals from a variety of foods is associated with lower levels of inflammation and more helpful bacteria in your gut.

We are hoping to do further research based on our findings.

Thanks so much for your participation in the study. For more details about our current research studies, or if you would like to read the published papers, please look at our website ascendalberta.ca under professional resources.

Happy Gut Smoothie

Here is a smoothie recipe to help you get the nutrients you need:

- ½ cup (125 mL) pineapple, fresh or frozen
- 1 medium banana, fresh or frozen
- 1 cup (250 mL) kale or spinach, fresh or frozen
- 2 Tbsp (30 mL) protein powder or collagen powder
- 1 Tbsp (15 mL) extra-virgin olive oil (flavoured taste better)
- 1 cup (250 mL) water, milk or fortified soy beverage

Add all ingredients to a blender. Blend until smooth. If using all fresh fruit and vegetables add 1 cup (250 mL) ice.