

Real Common Sense

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The Leaky Gut

Hello, this is Dr. Ellen. In this month's '*Real Common Sense*' newsletter, I want to write about leaky gut syndrome (LGS). I have seen many patients over the years whose complaints appeared related to LGS. Most had tried many other approaches, both conventional and alternative, to alleviate their related problems; unfortunately, they had seen little if any improvement. Coming to me was often a 'last resort'. Using the Ellen Cutler Method (ECM), I have been able to help patients find their way back toward wellness. Along with identifying and desensitizing reactivities, perhaps the most important part of their program to help mitigate the LGS was dietary modification in conjunction with supplementation, especially with the incorporation of full spectrum digestive enzymes.

By the way, if you haven't had a chance to see my previous newsletters, you can find them on my new website, www.drellencutler.com under 'Media'.

What is a Leaky Gut?

The inner intestinal lining of our gut serves an extremely vital role in our overall health. It is responsible for helping digest our food and then to absorb into our bloodstream the vital nutrients made available through the digestive process. Equally important is the barrier it provides to prevent partially digested food, toxins, and bacteria and other microbes from entering the tissues beneath.⁽¹⁾ The intestinal barrier includes the surface mucus that overlies the epithelial layer of cells and is allied with a number of defenses of the immune system.⁽²⁾ When the permeability of the intestinal wall is excessive, this is often referred to as leaky gut syndrome (LGS).

The greatest focus in studying LGS has been on the epithelial cells lining the inner walls of the intestines. These cells are tightly adhered to those next to them, and these 'tight junctions' are largely responsible for the degree of permeability in the intestinal walls. The tight junctions appear to be reversibly regulated by a protein called zonulin, which is mainly derived from the liver, and additionally from the inner epithelial cells themselves, immune cells, and several other tissues of different organs.⁽³⁾

Why be concerned about a Leaky Gut?

LGS may cause or contribute to many different and varied symptoms. These include chronic diarrhea and/or constipation, bloating, nutritional deficiencies, joint pain, fatigue, headaches, confusion, and difficulty concentrating. However, LGS has been associated with the development of several chronic inflammatory diseases, celiac disease, chronic liver disease, food allergies/sensitivities, irritable bowel syndrome (IBS), and polycystic ovary syndrome.⁽⁴⁾ A leaky gut may also be a causative or additive factor in many other conditions as well. These include chronic fatigue syndrome, fibromyalgia, asthma, acne, obesity, and even mental/emotional disturbances.⁽¹⁾

A low-grade systemic inflammation may be caused by the leakage of materials to which the individual is sensitive (antigens) into the bloodstream. Especially in those who are genetically predisposed, a leaky gut may allow antigens to enter the body and trigger the initiation and development of an autoimmune disease, such as Crohn's disease and type 1 diabetes. Several studies have shown that an autoimmune process may be induced by pathogenic bacteria in the gut, which can facilitate a leaky gut. For example, *Helicobacter pylori*, a bacterium that often infects the human stomach, is known to increase epithelial permeability.⁽⁶⁾ Other factors may disrupt the gut microbiota and thus contribute to increased intestinal permeability. These include poor nutrition, alcohol consumption, use of non-steroidal anti-inflammatory drugs such as ibuprofen, infections, and stress.^(4,5) 'Poor nutrition' would include a diet high in fats and low in fiber, a prominent feature of the standard American diet.⁽⁷⁾

Tightening the junctions for better health

The dietary choices you make can have a direct impact on intestinal permeability. I have found that the healthiest diet for gut health is a whole food plant-based dietary plan. This diet is naturally low in saturated fats and high in dietary fiber, the latter being recognized as a protective nutrient for the intestinal barrier. Fiber contributes to the healthy state of the gut microbiota, allowing gut bacteria to produce healthy short-chained fatty acids, which are responsible for dietary fiber's beneficial effects.⁽⁷⁾ A whole food plant-based diet also restricts inflammatory processed sugars and starches and encourages the intake of prebiotics in foods such as bananas and berries.⁽⁸⁾

As mentioned above, studies have shown that the gut microbiota may play a key role in the regulation of intestinal permeability. Some probiotics may enhance the production of tight junction proteins and help mitigate the leaky gut.⁽⁶⁾ Naturally occurring probiotics can be found in fermented foods such as fermented kimchi and fermented pickles.⁽⁸⁾

Other lifestyle changes can support a healthy gut and potentially decrease the risk or worsening of LGS. These include regular exercise, getting sufficient nightly sleep regularly, and reducing stress. Of course, quitting smoking is always a good idea and may also decrease LGS risk.⁽⁴⁾

Additionally, I have found that many of my patients have benefitted from the use of certain supplements. Some patients have had success when using a well-formulated probiotic

supplement, vitamin D₃⁽⁶⁾, modified citrus pectin, psyllium seed husks, and/or chlorella. I have seen the most significant benefit when, along with an improved diet (see above), the person uses my broad-spectrum digestive enzyme supplement (consumer-available *Digest Supreme*) at the beginning of each meal. Those with gastrointestinal symptoms sometimes find my modified broad-spectrum digestive enzyme supplement with added herbal extracts and phytonutrient (consumer-available *G.I. Calm*) to be better tolerated. *G.I. Calm* can also be used in between meals to help ease gastrointestinal discomfort.

Through ECM testing, I can determine the best dietary and lifestyle changes for each person. This is especially true with disturbances away from optimal physiologic function, such as a leaky gut. However, even without the testing, most people seem to benefit from moving toward a whole food plant-based diet and using a broad-spectrum digestive enzyme supplement before each meal.

Be well, be healthy, and remember...

“Your gut is not Las Vegas. What happens in the gut does not stay in the gut.”
— Peter Kozlowski, MD

Dr. Ellen

References:

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