

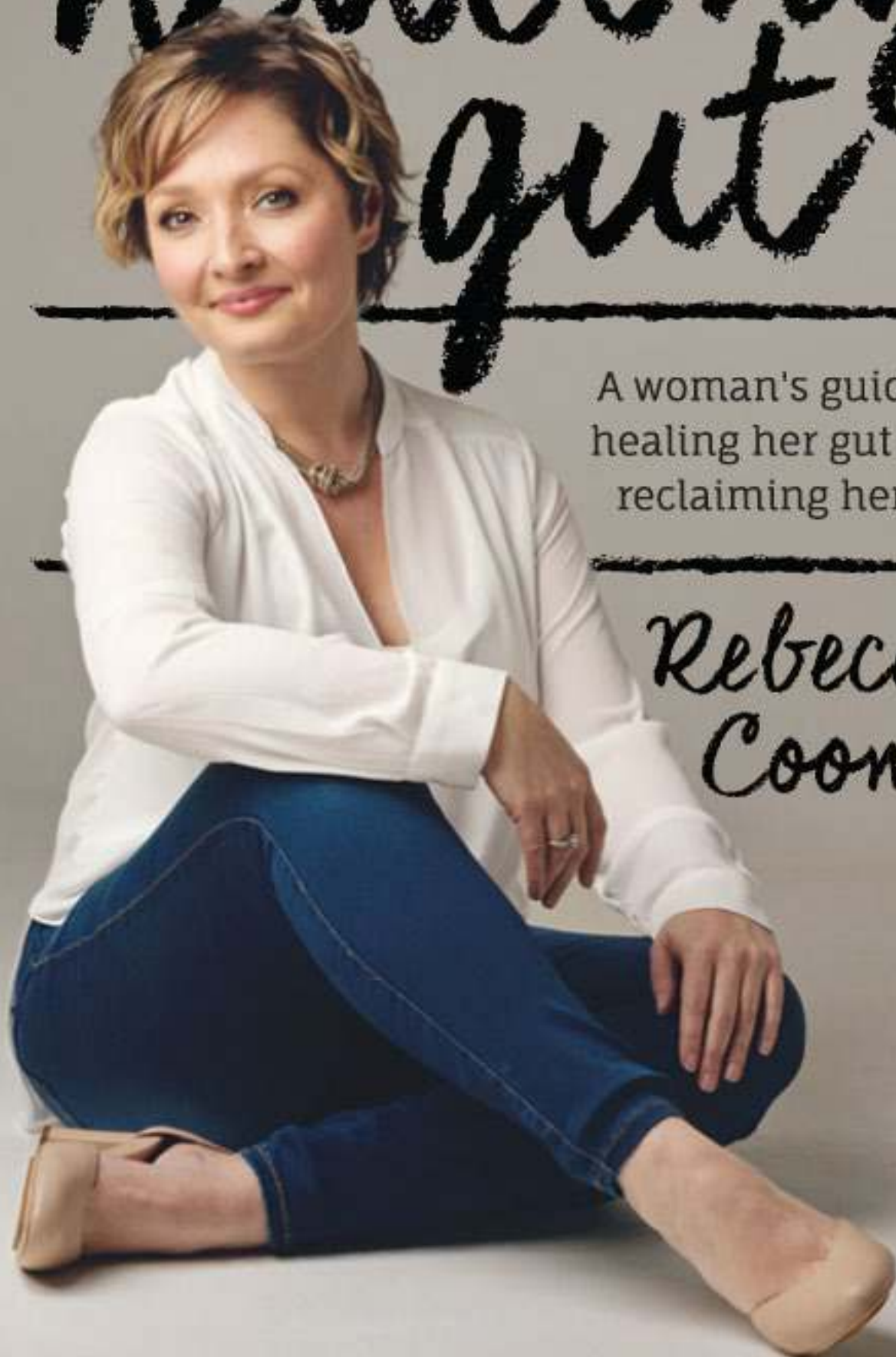
# the Healthy gut

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A woman's guide to  
healing her gut and  
reclaiming her life

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Rebecca  
Coomes



First published in 2015 by The Healthy Gut.

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Cover, interior and illustrations by Jordan Rachel Lee Design.

Author photo by Aliko Dimitrakopoulos, Soul Impressions Photography.

Rebecca has tackled her personal health issues head on. She was dedicated, committed, positive, determined and, ultimately, successful. She has used these exact attributes in the development of The Gut Health program and in the writing of her book. She knows that tens of thousands of women around the country can overcome their gut issues, just as she did hers, and we are so fortunate that she has put together this work.

*Natalie Cruttenden*

**NATUROPATH**

Working with Rebecca has been an amazing experience. Never before I have seen someone so determined and committed to making positive change to their life. Rebecca's journey has been a long one and like any journey worth taking, it came with some hurdles. However, her ability to juggle the workload of her successful business and busy social life whilst still maintaining her focus on training consistently and educating herself on how to fix her gut problems is truly inspiring. She's a testament to hard work getting you places in life. I think it is amazing she is now going to share her experiences and teach others how they can heal their gut and unlock the door to a better life through better health.

*Shaun Seymour*

**PERSONAL TRAINER AND NUTRITIONIST**

Rebecca is just about the most resilient person I have met. She approaches adversity with courage and intelligence. She is the sort of person who not just identifies a problem but then ensures she finds a solution.

*Michele Silva*

**PSYCHOLOGIST**

this book is for you.

my friends, my family and the  
people who don't believe they'll  
ever feel better.

please remember, anything  
is possible.

# contents

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My Story	05
The basics of digestion	08
Small Intestinal Bacterial Overgrowth	11
Eating Your Emotions and the Effect Stress Has On Your Gut	18
How to manage friends and family	23
Resources	27
References	32
Get In Touch	33

# my story

## CHAPTER 01

My body was destined for a dodgy digestive system from the day I was born. Born eight weeks premature, I was a scrawny little thing, unable to breast feed and immediately put on formula. I loved the stuff and would bang my tiny fists against the humidicrib if the nurses didn't feed me quickly enough. They worried I would break my tiny bones, so they padded my crib with cloth nappies so I couldn't do any damage.

I would lay on my back guzzling the creamy white formula, while all the other preemie babies would look tiny and pathetic in comparison. It seems I was born with a love of food and a strong will.

Formula is a miracle for babies who can't breastfeed, but it doesn't provide all the vital antibodies only mother's milk can impart. This would be the second whack to my immune system. There just wasn't enough good bacteria to support a healthy gut.

Without a great digestive foundation, I was the kid who was always sick. You name it, I got it. I suffered from terrible colic as a baby, contracted mumps, asthma and a dairy intolerance before I started school. I coughed so much that my mother taped it so doctors could hear how bad I sounded.

Tonsillitis was a constant friend. If I spent time swimming, I would end up with abscesses on my eardrums. I had such a bad case of chicken pox that I was nearly photographed for the medical journals. Hepatitis A left me jaundiced with haunting yellow eyes and Glandular Fever put me in bed for a month, with another six months before I started feeling normal.

Common colds would leave me bed ridden for weeks with fevers so bad I would hallucinate and see rabbits on the ceiling. And when I hit puberty, I developed terrible acne across my face, neck, arms, chest and back.

The solution every time I got sick was to ply me with antibiotics. I have fond memories of a sweet tasting pink liquid antibiotic as a child, because it came with stickers that I loved. When the acne started, doctors tried treating it with antibiotics for months on end, with no success. What little good bacteria I had in my gut was being wiped out.

My immune system was in trouble from a young age, but I would also suffer severe emotional trauma. A relative began sexually abusing me when I was eight years old. Despite my vocal nature, I didn't tell a soul, and the abuse continued for several years. At 15, I plucked up the courage and told my parents, but the damage was done. I loathed myself. I hated mirrors and every chance I got I would tell myself how hideous I was. I became bulimic, gorging and purging, all the while filling the pot with hatred and such negative internal chatter that my guts burned with stress, anxiety and hate.

After I graduated from university I left Australia and moved to London. It was an exciting time as I felt alive and free: the master of my destiny. I thought running away from my problems would solve them, and for a while I felt pretty happy. I had easy access to cheap booze and party drugs, and I used them most weekends to block out the negative emotions swimming in my head.

During my time in London, I was diagnosed with endometriosis, an autoimmune disease that attacks the uterus and can render a woman infertile. It was here where I met my first open-minded holistic doctor who suggested I cut out wheat and dairy. She had seen significant improvements with her patients when they removed these inflammatory foods.

After a lifetime of suffering from a constant feeling of bleugh, I was amazed at how much better I felt without wheat and dairy. I was a wheat junkie, and ate some form of it at every meal. Gone were the 3pm energy slumps, I didn't feel sick anymore and I had much more vitality. It was like someone had lifted a veil and allowed me to see clearly again. I was a new woman.

I noticed that foods I had once eaten without a problem, were causing

similar reactions as wheat and dairy. I would bloat, have stomach pains and experience heartburn, indigestion and listlessness. I made countless trips to the doctors, who ran multiple blood tests, all showing me in *perfect* health.

I was depressed, overweight and feeling helpless. No one could tell me what was wrong with me and I was often told it was all in my head. After years of self-hatred, this only proved I was faulty.

When I returned to Australia I had a surreptitious conversation with a colleague at my new workplace. I was complaining that I was still suffering from symptoms despite removing wheat and dairy. She told me she had great success from following the *Eat Right for Your Type* book, which spoke about certain foods being right or wrong for you depending on your blood type. I went out that week and purchased a copy, implementing the program immediately. It awakened something within me, and was the start of my journey to health. For the first time, food wasn't the enemy. I stopped blaming food for my weight gain, instead seeing it as vital fuel that could cause positive or negative results depending on what I ate.

I was scared that life was passing me by. I felt ashamed because I wasn't making the most of my life. And more than anything, I was fearful that I would never feel well.

But all of those fears spurred me into action. I realised I was the only person who could reclaim my health and that if I wasn't receiving answers from the doctors, I needed to research solutions for myself and continue looking for practitioners until I found the right ones for me.

I realised there were very limited resources available to women like me, who were tired of being a slave to their symptoms. As the years have passed, I have read broadly on the digestive system, and began integrating what I learnt into my life.

*The Healthy Gut* is a guide for women who want to understand their digestive problems, with tools to do something about it. In this book, I explain how I changed my life by healing not only my gut, but also my mental outlook and physical body. I am passionate about helping women reach their full potential, free from pain, bloating and negative emotions. I hope this book will empower you to take action too.



# the basics of digestion

## CHAPTER 02

The first entry point for our digestion is the mouth, where we excrete saliva through our salivary glands. Saliva is basically made up of filtered blood, with the red blood cells filtered out, while calcium, parts of our immune system and hormones are kept in this clear liquid that, amongst other things, helps us chew. When we chew properly we break up chunks of food, making it easier for our digestion to handle it.

Our tongue not only provides taste sensory information to our brain to tell us if the food is good or bad, but at the root of the tongue the immune system really kicks up a gear. The Lingual tonsils, or the bumps at the root of your tongue, analyse every thing that passes them. Immune cells are on the ready and investigate whether the substance is friend or foe, alerting the immune army if trouble is ahead.

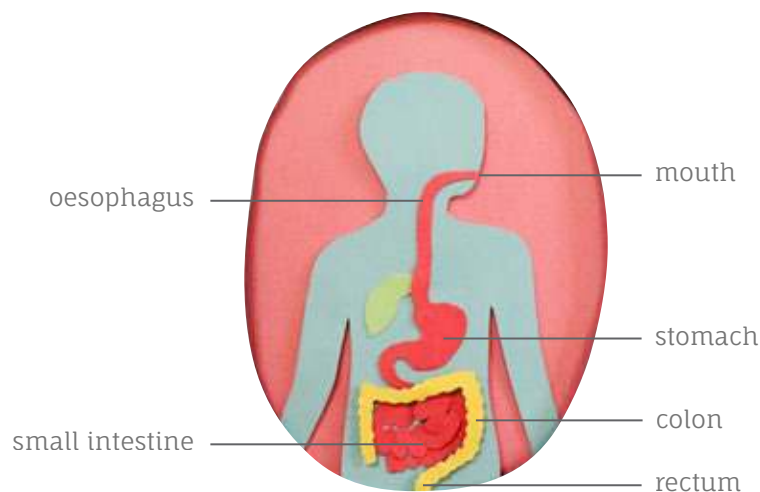
Once we swallow, our food heads down our oesophagus, a muscular tube that contracts and expands in a wave like motion. This helps move your food and liquid down to your stomach. It hooks a right turn into our stomach, passing through the lower oesophageal sphincter. This acts as a doorway between the oesophagus and the stomach, and stops food and stomach juices from returning back up. Our stomach sits just under our heart and lungs and is much higher up than we often think it is. Stomach pains are generally digestive pains, because we feel them lower down in our tummy as we've come to call it.

The stomach has strong defences from the acids, enzymes and juices

found within it to help break down food. The oesophagus doesn't have the same level of defence, and when food and juices end up in it, called reflux, it causes a burning, pain or pressure sensation in your chest.

The stomach breaks down your food into a soft mush known as *chyme* before it then enters the small intestine. When I studied biology at school, I always found it ironic that it was called the small intestine, when it actually stretches out for somewhere between three and six meters. A hollow organ, it continues the digestion of the food, breaking it down into smaller particles. Our liver and pancreas secrete digestive juices that help break down the chyme into smaller molecules.

Our small intestine is covered in microscopic villi, which in turn are covered by microvilli, which catch our partially digested food as it comes their way. They help increase the surface area of our digestive tract, maximising our chance to digest and absorb vital nutrients. They also absorb the digested molecules, passing it into the blood vessels headed for the liver, where it is screened before passing into the main circulatory system.



From here, what's left enters the large intestine or colon, whose primary purpose is to break down the remaining particles and remove water from your waste product and ready it to be excreted.

The colon doesn't have the same surface as the small intestine, so it relies on bacteria to break down the last of the particles for us. It is for this reason that the large intestine is home to most of our gut bacteria. Consider these numbers for a moment: the small intestine has around 100,000 bacteria per  $\frac{1}{4}$  teaspoon of content. In contrast, the large intestine has 20 billion bacteria per  $\frac{1}{4}$  teaspoon of content.

It takes around sixteen hours for the colon to process a meal, leaving the small intestine the job of processing the next few meals that come its way. Any nutrients absorbed are first filtered through the liver and then onto the circulatory system. It's where we also absorb key minerals like calcium and vitamins like vitamin K, vitamin B12 and riboflavin.

At the end of this journey, the large intestine moves to the rectum and passes the meal out as faeces.

Now that we have recapped basic biology, let's take a look at what can go wrong.

# small intestinal bacterial overgrowth

## CHAPTER 03

The human body is made up of trillions of bacteria and scientists believe they could weigh up to ten kilograms. So that explains those extra kilos I can't shift! But in all seriousness, the bacteria in our bodies allow us to digest our food, amongst other things.

In a healthy body, our bacteria works in harmony with our systems, but like all delicate systems it is very easy to get out of whack.

### WHAT IS SIBO?

Small Intestinal Bacterial Overgrowth (SIBO) is caused when normal bacteria enters the small intestine in large numbers, causing havoc. Remember in the previous chapter how a healthy small intestine only has a fraction of the bacteria that the colon has? This is because the primary purpose of the small intestine is to absorb and digest food, through the release of enzymes via the villi and microvilli. It is estimated that 50% of the population suffers from SIBO, yet it mostly goes undiagnosed.

If you suffer from the following symptoms, you may be suffering from SIBO:

- Bloating
- Cramping
- Constipation
- Diarrhoea
- Alternating constipation and diarrhoea
- Food sensitivities
- Burping and farting
- Chronic digestive complaints
- Abdominal cramping and pain
- Joint pain
- Skin rashes
- Iron and B12 deficiency
- Respiratory symptoms such as asthma

I had suffered from many of these symptoms for the majority of my life. When my naturopath suggested I may have SIBO I was somewhat repulsed. Whilst I knew that we had bacteria within us, being forced to think about having an overflow of bacteria living in my small intestine, eating my food and producing gas, made me feel icky.

## **WHAT CAUSES SIBO?**

It is believed that SIBO can be caused through a variety of means:

- Food poisoning
- The contraceptive pill
- Gastroenteritis
- Gastrointestinal infection and upset
- Antibiotic use
- Acid blockers
- Fungus overgrowth
- Surgical intervention and operations to the abdomen. Eg. Appendectomy.
- A dysfunctional ileocecal valve
- Overconsumption of simple carbohydrates
- Stress causing changes to the acidity levels in the stomach and motility of the small intestines, which causes pooling and stagnation of food, which causes bacterial overgrowth
- Hypothyroidism
- Diabetes
- Initial colonization of bad bacteria due to caesarian birth and lack of breast feeding

As I scrolled through the list, I realized with alarm that it was no wonder I had ended up with SIBO. I have had several cases of food poisoning over the years, and picked up the nasty gastrointestinal parasite giardia. It left me bedridden and in and out of hospital for several weeks. I have spent years of my life on antibiotics, and I've had three surgeries to my abdomen. I was a carb addict and used to joke that I thrived on high pressure, stressful situations. To top it all off, whilst I was born naturally, I missed out on the vital nutrients from breast-feeding.

## **WHAT DOES SIBO DO TO YOU?**

Instead of allowing the villi and microvilli to absorb nutrients from the food, the bacteria digest it instead, causing it to ferment. A bi-product of the bacteria's digestion is methane and/or hydrogen gas, which is only produced by the bacteria and not our bodies. I like to think of it as the school bully, who grabs the little kid's food and shovels it down. A few minutes later he's burping and farting while the young child is left hungry.

These gases cause bloating, wind, cramping, diarrhoea, burping, constipation and more. It is also believed this gas can cause leaky gut syndrome, where the cell wall of the gut becomes permeable and allows food particles through to the blood stream, which creates an immune response.

The other side effect of SIBO is damage to the villi and microvilli, which results in nutrients not being absorbed. Despite my very healthy diet prior to my SIBO diagnosis, I was lacking nutrients. When the critters digest your food, it means they're taking a lot of the nutrients before it makes it to you, which leads to malabsorption of monosaccharides, amino acids, vitamins (especially B12 and folic acid) and minerals (especially magnesium, iron and calcium). They were stealing my nutrients right from under my nose.

Some side effects of poor nutrient absorption can include fatigue, hormonal imbalances, and restless leg syndrome.

Other damage caused by the bacterial overgrowth can be the suspension of the natural muscular wave that occurs every ninety minutes, to push food along. The bacteria interrupt this wave, because they like their new home and don't want to be moved along. This further increases the time food spends in the small intestine and its ability to ferment. It was

pretty obvious that my motility had been affected for many years, as I was unable to go to the toilet every day.

Sugary and starchy foods make SIBO symptoms worse as the bacteria love to eat them. Foods that contain gluten, grains, starches like potatoes, legumes and pulses, fruits and some vegetables are problematic. And despite the promotion that we should be having a high fibre diet with the use of fibre supplements, this only exacerbates the problem and people suffering SIBO will feel worse, not better, when using these supplements.

SIBO generates toxins, which put pressure on the lymphatic system, the immune system and our body's own detoxification system.

Unfortunately, SIBO goes largely undiagnosed which can result in years of damage to the small intestine. People may develop intolerances to certain foods like gluten, lactose or fructose, as the small intestine becomes less equipped to manage it. Over a ten year period I watched as my system slowly rejected more foods and I couldn't understand why.

SIBO is believed to be a major cause for Irritable Bowel Syndrome (IBS). It is estimated that one in five Australians have IBS yet many doctors don't test for SIBO. The test is an easy and non-invasive breath test and I believe it should be undertaken for anyone presenting digestive symptoms linked to SIBO.

It is difficult to treat other digestive problems if SIBO remains present, and the longer it remains in the small intestine, the more damage it can cause. I believe I developed SIBO as a child, but only had it diagnosed in my mid 30s. I probably had it for thirty years before I did anything about it. That's a long time for bacteria to cause a lot of damage.

## **WHAT CONDITIONS ARE ASSOCIATED WITH SIBO?**

There are a number of conditions that are known to be associated with SIBO. These are:

- Irritable Bowl Syndrome (IBS)
- Acid reflux
- Coeliac disease
- Chronic Fatigue Syndrome
- Fibromyalgia
- Chronic constipation

- Inflammatory bowel disease (eg. Crohn's and ulcerative colitis)
- Diabetes
- Restless leg syndrome
- Acne rosacea
- Hyperthyroidism
- Scleroderma
- Chronic Prostatitis
- Non alcoholic Steatohepatitis (NASH)
- Liver cirrhosis
- Diverticulitis

## **WHAT CAN BE DONE TO TREAT SIBO?**

Many practitioners take a double approach through diet and active treatment. They believe it is important to stop feeding the bacteria. This means removing the foods they love to eat: sugars, carbohydrates and starches. They can live for several months without food so a diet that avoids these substances is required.

Along with starving them, it's important to reduce their numbers by killing them. This can be done through herbal antimicrobials, antibiotics or both. When both approaches are taken (starvation and death), people appear have the best results.

It's also important to address stress levels, poor sleep and movement as these can impact recovery.

Once the critters are gone, it's important to reintroduce the good bacteria so they can help heal your gut and fight future battles against the baddies.

A study conducted in America compared the results of patients who had been diagnosed with SIBO. One group were given an antibiotic, rifaximin and the others were given herbal antimicrobials. Four weeks later they were re-tested and 46% of the patients given herbal antimicrobials had rid their SIBO, as opposed to only 36% of the patients given antibiotics.

Knowing that SIBO could be resistant to antibiotics, I felt that a more natural treatment program would be better for me, rather than taking more antibiotics, which may not work.



## **WHAT IF YOU SLIP UP?**

When I first started the treatment program I told myself that I'd allow a little cheat day here and there. I was convinced that a little bite of something tasty wouldn't be so bad. My naturopath suspected I was thinking this and told me that cheat days would set me back. If I did slip up then we would deal with it, but all of the hard work I'd put in until that point would be undone as I would be giving the bacteria a nice big meal of something they loved.

Three months in to my SIBO treatment I had a particularly difficult day. I had moved house, was physically exhausted and had no food to eat in the house. I went down to the local pub for dinner and decided that I was going to drink some wine. I had three glasses over the course of the night, washed down with plenty of water, and thought that it was fine. My guts had other ideas and told me in no uncertain terms that they hated me for it. But the worst was yet to come. The next day I was dying from a hangover. The kind of hangover you only expect after downing an entire bottle of vodka and dancing on a table top. How was it fair that I felt this bad after so little?

Sheepishly, I confessed my actions to my naturopath the next time I saw her. She explained that I had given the bacteria a nice big feed of sugar and they were thanking me for it. I could picture my bacteria leaping and jumping for joy, smothering themselves in all the sugary wine goodness as it came their way. From then on I vowed to be strict, no matter what, as I didn't want to give them another feed again.

I never knew I had such strong will power until I started treating my SIBO. There were times when it felt hard, times when I wanted to pump my fists in the air and scream about the injustice of it all. But when I started to feel better, it kept me going, and when I was told six months later that I no longer had SIBO, I was as happy as a child on Christmas Day. I did it! I had beaten the critters and felt amazing for it.

If you tick any of the symptoms below, you may have SIBO. Contact your GP or naturopath for a consultation.

- Bloating
- Cramping
- Constipation
- Diarrhoea
- Alternating constipation and diarrhoea
- Food sensitivities
- Burping and farting
- Chronic digestive complaints
- Abdominal cramping and pain
- Joint pain
- Skin rashes
- Iron and B12 deficiency
- Respiratory symptoms such as asthma

# eating your emotions & the effect stress has on your gut

## CHAPTER 04

When I was fifteen I experienced significant emotional trauma. My abuser had returned into my life after a period of absence.

The result was that I was overwhelmed with emotions: anxiety, fear, depression, self-loathing, negative body image, anger, hatred and more. Many sexual abuse survivors turn to the things they can control, and food is one of them. Whilst some of us may avoid food as the ultimate form of control, I went the other way, and ate my way through my emotions.

I would binge on highly processed foods like crisps and chocolate, until I felt sick. I would then purge it up, sometimes repeating this process several times a day. With every purge, I reinforced the hatred and self-loathing. My gut would be on fire, burning with emotions and unsettled from the unnatural upheaval.

Every time I wound up in this state, full of stress and anxiety, my body would release the stress hormone cortisol.

## **CORTISOL**

Cortisol is known as the stress hormone and is released from the adrenal glands. Its primary role is to ready the body for a fight or flight situation, and it does this by releasing glucose into your blood stream ready for rapid action. It increases our strength, speed, and mental focus, and decreases our pain.

Our bodies release cortisol for both real and perceived danger. We see cortisol at work when people find themselves in life and death situations; where they find incredible strength to do something, like move a car with their bare hands.

The body assumes this stressful situation will be short lived, so it diverts blood flow away from non-vital organs, like the digestive system, and puts it into the heart, lungs and muscles so you're ready for flight or fight.

In our modern world, cortisol comes in handy for short-term situations, such as running for the bus, hitting a tight work deadline or competing in a sporting event.

Cortisol can also respond to other situations in the body, such as low blood sugar, physical exertion and sleep deprivation.

Chronic or constant stress is sadly common in today's world. We can feel stress from work, our partners, families, financial pressures, social pressures, chronic illness and pain, and excessive exercise.

Once we slip into a state of chronic stress, our bodies are being constantly flooded with cortisol, which causes many problems. I spent years in a constant state of stress as a result of the sexual abuse, bullying at school and later high pressured jobs.

In addition to the fight and flight mechanism, cortisol is also used to wake us up and put us to sleep. In a healthy body, cortisol is at its highest just before waking and should be at its lowest before bed, declining steadily throughout the day.

For years I described myself as a night owl. I would get a huge surge of energy around 10pm, which would often keep me awake well into the small hours. I sometimes only got a couple of hours sleep before I started

the process all over again.

When my alarm would go off at 7am I felt like I had to drag myself from the depths of the deepest ocean, my exhaustion would be so intense. When I met my naturopath, I flippantly told her that I was a night owl, which led to her suggesting my cortisol levels were out of whack, so she gave me a supplement to bring them into normal order. Immediately I started to feel tired when it was time for bed, and I would spring out of bed in the morning, awake and refreshed. I no longer felt wired at night and providing I didn't look at a bright computer screen or get emotionally revved up, I would be ready for bed at a normal hour.

Chronic cortisol exposure is damaging and can affect your immune system, thyroid function, metabolism, slow down the healing process, increase blood pressure, decrease bone density, cause muscle wasting, and increase your appetite. This in turn can lead to obesity, abdominal fat and disrupted hormone signals.

Chronic stress can lead to systemic inflammation, which causes a range of problems and is linked to heart disease, obesity, diabetes, Alzheimer's and other mental disorders like depression and anxiety.

Chronic stress has a significant impact on our digestion too. If our body is always diverting blood supply away from it, how can we possibly get the most out of our food? Our body has a trick for this, and it stores it as fat, so it can come back to it at a later date and use it as energy. However, in today's world, tomorrow never comes and we continue to pile on the stress and the excess kilograms despite our best efforts to get slim.

I held several high-powered jobs over the years that were constantly stressful, either because of an excessive workload, mean boss, or both. I would work late most night, often not eating dinner until 9pm. I always felt hungry, which led to snacking during the day. I thought I was being careful with what I ate and only ate 'healthy' snacks such as fruit and rice crackers, but despite regular exercise, my weight continued to increase.

## **SO WHAT CAN YOU DO TO REDUCE YOUR STRESS AND YOUR CORTISOL LEVELS?**

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Firstly you need to identify what's causing you stress. I sat down and wrote about all of the things that worried me. I was unhappy in my job,

my relationship, my financial situation, my health and my weight.

I then looked at what I could control immediately, what I could control in the near future and what needed more time.

I had been considering starting my own business for some time and could see that the biggest stressor in my life was my job. I felt trapped, unsupported, unappreciated and had begun to dread going in to work every day. I was fortunate enough to have some money saved so I quit my job and went out on my own.

Almost overnight my stress levels dissipated. I woke up on the first morning of self employment, and whilst there was a modest feeling of *'oh my god, what have I done?'*, I felt excited that I now had the power to control my life, and reduce my stress.

I also recognised that working such long hours had prevented me from exercising regularly. I found a wonderful personal trainer who was willing to work with me and rebuild my strength and fitness. I began training three to four times a week with him, as well as exercising on other days, and the build-up of stress quickly melted away.

Our bodies are designed to move when we feel stressed, so where possible a great way of handling stress is to get moving. Head to the gym and lift some weights, which the body will think is your fight mechanism. Or if you prefer to jog, pound the pavement and your body will think it's in flight mode.

I have also incorporated other relaxation techniques into my day. I love yoga, walking in the fresh air, hiking in the mountains, massage, meditation, listening to music, cooking and writing. All of these activities soothe me and immediately melt away my stress.

You may prefer to play with your children or have a game with your dog, head into the garden, be intimate with your partner or go shopping. Find some activities that work for you and ensure it is part of your daily life.

Cooking and sharing food with friends and family can be a wonderful way to connect with people, and I particularly enjoy having people over and cooking up a storm. Over thousands of years, humans have come together to celebrate and commiserate with food so if this causes you

pleasure, reincorporate it back into your life.

### **IS STRESS GETTING THE BETTER OF YOU?**

Write down the things that are making you stressed, and look at what you can do today, in the near future or what needs more time to resolve. By crossing off some of your stressors in the *today* section, you will immediately feel less stressed as you take control.

Today	Near Future	Longer Term

# how to manage friends & family

## CHAPTER 05

I am incredibly lucky to have a very supportive, caring and understanding circle of friends. They have provided me with support over the years as I've battled my health concerns. They have stood by me, listened to me whinge about how unfair life is and witnessed first hand the physical side effects of eating the wrong foods. For years they watched me fall ill every winter and would be there to give me words of sympathy when I was completely fed up with how I was feeling.

In recent times, they have been my cheerleaders as I've discovered the path to my wellness. They've listened to my crazy ideas and dreams of helping others regain their health. On many occasions they've heard my mantra, 'If I can do it, others can too.'

Not everyone was on my team though. Acquaintances, relatives and colleagues would make snide remarks that they didn't *believe* in food intolerances, insinuating that my problems were all in my head. Emotionally, this could be pretty difficult, especially when I was suffering excruciating stomach pain and being told it wasn't real. I can promise you that when your stomach is so swollen that you can't fit into your trousers, and it feels



like an alien is doing acrobatics inside your gut with sharp blades, it feels *very* real.

Many different tactics can work for explaining to people what is going on. For some, you may find being upfront and factual works. If you have received a diagnosis, tell them. I told everyone that I had a bacterial overgrowth and had to be super strict to avoid making it worse.

For others, they want to see what's wrong. I've shown the extent of my bloated stomach on many occasions. I've even let people feel how rock hard it is. When they see the different food makes, they understand why it's important to avoid it.

And then there are those that no matter what you say, or what you show them, they simply don't want to believe. In those situations, hold your head up high and walk away. There is no point getting upset or angry by these people.

## **HANDLING FAMILY GATHERINGS**

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Perhaps you have an Aunt or Grandmother who doesn't take no for an answer when it comes to eating their food. Digestive problems weren't such a thing in their day and older generations can find it difficult to understand why you can't eat the food they have made for you. 'But we've always eaten it' they will say.

One trick I have learned is to offer to bring a dish. That way I know that even if there is nothing else available, I can safely eat my food. If you suspect they won't have catered for you, eat a snack or a meal before you go, so you're not left starving while everyone else tucks into food that will upset your system.

I have even been known to turn up with an entire meal for myself when it's been a long event, knowing that at some point I will get very hungry. I often have raw nuts on hand, so if all else fails I will eat a handful of these to stave off my hunger. Boiled eggs are a great snack if you can tolerate them, and have also been a staple for me.

If you're lucky, friends and family may be interested in learning how to cook differently, so you could offer to cook with them, teaching them ways to cook so you can still enjoy their food.

I particularly enjoy taking old recipes and converting them into dishes that I can eat today, and I get a real kick out of cooking for people and not telling them about the *missing ingredients*. Good, nutritious whole food doesn't need to taste bland and I have found that people really enjoy it when it's given to them without much pomp and ceremony.

Christmas Day can be a challenge as there is so much food on offer, as well as being a traditional time of year. I have cooked my family's Christmas meal for many years now, so it has been easy for me to ensure there was food that I could eat. Last Christmas was the first year when I was completely compliant to my new food lifestyle. I pimped the Christmas menu and no one really noticed that it was missing inflammatory foods. This Christmas why don't you offer to cook so you can pimp your menu?

## **FALLING OFF THE WAGON**

But what if you slip up and eat something you're not supposed to? We're all human and we make mistakes. Before you bite into that mouthful, pause and consider if it's really worth it. If you know it will cause pain and bloating, the simple act of pausing might give you enough time to reconsider and decide that you value your health more than a few seconds of taste bud bliss.

When I began treating my SIBO I didn't believe I could stick to the rigid diet for more than a month. Whatever your health concerns, you can do it too. No matter how hard the pressure is from your loved ones, it is ultimately up to you to take full, complete responsibility for your health. They won't be the ones suffering in thirty minutes with terrible symptoms, but you will be. Ask yourself: is it really worth it?

## **BEWARE DOCTOR GOOGLE**

Hands up who's ever typed their symptoms into Google only to diagnose yourself with cancer? I have, on many occasions. I would go on the hunt for explanations for what was happening, only to come across sites that listed potential causes such as bowel cancer, amongst other things. I would try desperately to keep my rising panic under control until it became too much and I'd book an appointment to see my GP. They would look at me like I was slightly insane, run some blood tests, which always came back perfectly healthy, and send me on my way.

## **BY WHY WAS I FEELING SO TERRIBLE ALL OF THE TIME?**

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I now know it is because my digestive system was highly inflamed and under attack from the excessive numbers of bacteria in my small intestine.

If you are concerned that you have an underlying disease, speak to your GP about it. They can run some blood tests to determine if certain markers are present in you blood, and if nothing else it will give you some peace of mind.

Then, build your health and wellness support team around you until you feel confident that you have specialists working for you to find you real solutions to how you feel.

So to recap, my top tips on surviving friends, family and Google are:

- ✓ Offer to bring a dish
- ✓ Always have safe snacks on hand
- ✓ Eat before you go somewhere so you're not left starving
- ✓ Offer to cook together and make it fun
- ✓ Don't Google every symptom
- ✓ Speak to your GP about your health concerns
- ✓ Build your support team Health and Wellness professionals
- ✓ Remember: it's your health and your life and you can make all the difference

# RESOURCES

This is a list of some of my favourite resources that have helped me through my journey of understanding my body and how I could heal it.

It is by no means an exhaustive list, but these are the ones I've really enjoyed. I hope you find value from them too.

## BOOKS

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*I particularly love David Perlmutter MD's books on the brain and the gut respectively. A neurologist, he is recognised internationally as a leader in the field of nutritional influences in neurological disorders and presents fascinating and insightful information in the following books.*

Perlmutter, D 2014, Grain Brain: The Surprising Truth about Wheat, Carbs and Sugar, Hodder & Stoughton, Great Britain.

Perlmutter, D 2015, Brain Maker; The Power of Gut Microbes to Heal and Protect Your Brain – For Life, Hodder & Stoughton, Great Britain.

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*Giulia Enders delivers an exceptionally engaging, informative and interesting tour of our gut. Delving into how it works, what's in it and its importance in our every day life, it is a must read for anyone interested in understanding the inner workings of one of our least understood organs.*

Enders, G 2014, Gut, the inside story of our body's most under-rated organ, Scribe Publications, Brunswick, Australia.

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*Dr Mark Pimental is one of the pioneers in SIBO research and has written about his research into it, believing it is the underlying cause of IBS.*

Pimental M 2006, A New IBS Solution. Bacteria: The Missing Link In Treating Irritable Bowel Syndrome, Health Point Press, Sherman Oakes, CA

*This is the book that first introduced me to the concept that food could harm as much as it could heal the human body, and that every person is different in the way we respond to foods.*

D'Adamo, Dr P J D 1998, Eat Right For Your Type, Century Books Limited, London, UK.

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*Whilst quite heavy going at times, this book by Nora T Gedgaudas is an interesting read if you are interested in how the human body developed from our pre-agricultural Paleolithic ancestors.*

Gedgaudas, N 2009, Primal Body, Primal Mind. Beyond The Paleo Diet for Total Health and a Longer Life, Healing Arts Press, Rochester, Vermont.

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*This book is a must-read if you have ever wondered how you put on weight. Gary Taubes explains the body's processes in an easy to understand manner, answering many life long questions of how and why.*

Taubes, G 2010, Why We Get Fat: And What to Do About It, Anchor Books, New York, USA

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*This is another excellent book from Gary Taubes, this time exploring the theory around carbohydrates instead fats being to blame for the obesity and diabetes epidemics.*

Taubes, G 2007, Good Calories, Bad Calories: Fats. Carbs. And The Controversial Science of Diet and Health, Random House, New York, USA.

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*Australian author David Gillespie is a recovering corporate lawyer. After gaining 40 kilograms he set out to discover why he was fat. Reviewing how the body converts and stores fat, this is a fascinating read into the perils of sugar consumption.*

Gillespie, D 2008, Sweet Poison: Why Sugar Makes Us Fat, Penguin Group, Melbourne, Australia

- - -

*Another book by David Gillespie explores why diets don't work, how to lose weight permanently and who the real culprits are of ill health and weight gain.*

Gillespie, D 2015, Eat Real Food. The Only Solution to Permanent Weight Loss and Disease Prevention, Pan Macmillan, Sydney, Australia.

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*Melissa and Dallas Hartwig are the creators of the Whole30 program, which teaches people how to eat real, whole food while removing processed junk. This book is an easy read and explains why common foods such as sugar, grains and dairy aren't great for our health.*

Hartwig, M; Hartwig D 2012, It Starts With Food: Discover the Whole30 and Change Your Life, Victory Belt Publishing Inc

## **COOKBOOKS**

*I am a big fan of the Australian author Irena Macri. Her cookbook Eat Drink Paleo has been a staple in my house and is well thumbed, as all of her recipes are delicious and easy to make.*

Macri, I 2015, Eat Drink Paleo Cookbook, Penguin Group, Australia.

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*Claire's cookbook was one of the first I found when beginning the journey of healing my gut. A fellow Australian, she is a Nutritional Medicine Practitioner and co-founder of Rejuvenated for Life.*

Yates, C 2013, Optimum Health the Paleo Way, Exisle Publishing Pty Ltd, Wollombi, Australia.

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*Simple, easy, tasty and straight forward recipes are delivered by Melissa Joulwan from The Clothes That Make The Girl. These recipe books have been staples in my kitchen.*

Joulwan, M 2013, Well Fed; Paleo Recipes for People Who Love to Eat, 8th edition, Smudge Publishing, Austin Texas.

Joulwan, M 2013, Well Fed 2; Paleo Recipes for People Who Love to Eat, 8th edition, Smudge Publishing, Austin Texas.

## WEBSITES AND DIGITAL RESOURCES

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*Dr. Allison Siebecker is known in SIBO circles as the Queen of SIBO. Her website houses a host of information, articles and YouTube videos that are a wonderful resource.*

Dr. Allison Siebecker, ND  
siboinfo.com

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*Dr. Nirala Jacobi, ND is a leading SIBO specialist based in Australia and provides a gold standard SIBO testing facility in Queensland. Her website provides useful information on SIBO, along with a preliminary diagnostic survey, which is useful to take if you suspect you suffer from SIBO.*

Dr. Nirala Jacobi, ND  
sibotest.com

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*Popular blogger and author of the Eat Drink Paleo Cookbook, Irena Macri's website is jam packed with great recipes.*

Eat Drink Paleo  
eatdrinkpaleo.com.au

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*Michelle Tam is another popular paleo blogger who houses a site full of delicious recipes, whilst adding some fun and quirkiness with her cartoon characters.*

Nom Nom Paleo  
nomnompaleo.com

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*Robb Wolf has a great site for paleo nutrition and lifestyle.*

Robb Wolf  
robbwolf.com

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*Mark's Daily Apple is a handy resource for all things primal, with recipes, exercise and lifestyle tips.*

Mark's Daily Apple  
marksdailyapple.com

*The Whole9 and Whole30 websites are handy resources when you're getting your head around changing your lifestyle and eating habits. Some tough love is dished out which was particularly useful for me.*

Whole 9 & Whole 30  
whole30.com

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*A practitioner of integrative medicine and a licensed acupuncturist, offering health and wellness programs and nutrition focused articles.*

Chris Kresser  
chriskresser.com

## **MOVIES AND DOCUMENTARIES**

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*Australian Damon Gameau embarked on a journey to discover the effects of sugar on the body by only eating a healthy low fat diet.*

That Sugar Film  
thatsugarfilm.com

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*This Oscar-nominated documentary looks at the food industry's harmful effects on the planet and human health.*

Food, Inc  
takepart.com/foodinc

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*This was the first documentary I watched that showed how damaging fast food could be to the human body in such a short space of time.*

Super Size Me

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*This documentary explores the underlying causes of childhood obesity in America. Katie Couric narrates the documentary. It was nominated for the Grand Jury Prize at the Sundance Film Festival.*

Fed Up  
fedupmovie.com



# references

I would like to thank Dr. Nirala Jacobi ND for allowing me to reference information on SIBO in this book. Further information can be found on SIBO and testing in Australia at [sibotest.com](http://sibotest.com).

thank you

Thank you for downloading the lite version of *The Healthy Gut* book. The simple fact that you have downloaded a copy means more to me than you can imagine.

The full version of this book will be released in 2016 and I look forward to sharing it with you then.

In good health

Rebecca x

Rebecca Coomes

## GET IN TOUCH

I would love to hear from anyone who has read this e-book with comments, suggestions or feedback.

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You can join our communities for regular updates, recipes, videos & more.

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# are you a woman suffering from bloating, food intolerances, heart burn or weight gain?

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Your gut may be unhealthy and keeping you sick and overweight. So what can you do today to reclaim your health? In *The Healthy Gut*, Rebecca Coomes shares five easy steps on how she changed her life by healing her mind, body and gut. You'll learn how to stop and listen to what your body is really trying to tell you, understand what foods cause a range of digestive discomfort and why movement is so important in your daily life.

Rebecca knows women often feel isolated and alone when suffering from daily digestive problems, and she shares how finding the right community can give you the support you need to make lasting changes to your health. Integrating all of this into your lifestyle will not only help you achieve success, but let you start living the life you know you should.

**Rebecca Coomes** spent most of her life feeling sick. Born two months premature, her immune system was underdeveloped and saw her develop food intolerances and an autoimmune disease by her mid 20s.

Changing her thoughts, how she moved and healing her gut saw her transform her life. Rebecca now wants to share her success with other women, showing them how they can take back control of their lives.

[TheHealthyGut.com.au](http://TheHealthyGut.com.au)

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ISBN 978-0-9944520-0-9



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