

The Doctor-Designed
Diet Plan for a Clean Gut and
a Slimmer Waist

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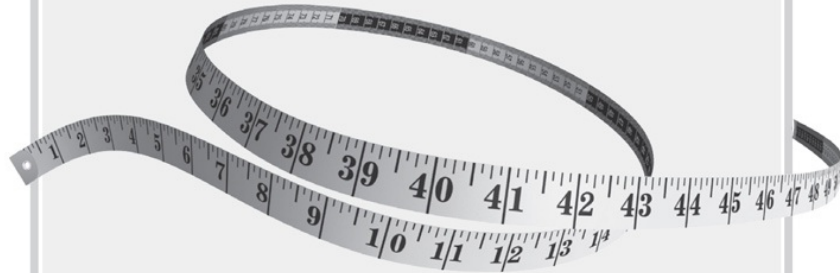
21-Day Belly Fix

TASNEEM BHATIA, M.D.

Author of *What Doctors Eat*

THE 21-DAY BELLY FIX

The Doctor-Designed
Diet Plan for a Clean Gut
and a Slimmer Waist



Tasneem Bhatia, M.D.

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ZINC INK

BALLANTINE BOOKS | NEW YORK

This book proposes a program of diet and exercise recommendations for the reader to follow. However, you should consult a qualified medical professional (including, if you are pregnant, your ob-gyn) before starting this or any other fitness program.

Please seek your doctor's advice before making any decisions that affect your health or extreme changes in your diet, particularly if you suffer from any medical condition or have any symptom that may require treatment. As with any diet or exercise program, if at any time you experience any discomfort, stop immediately and consult your physician.

A Zinc Ink Trade Paperback Original

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LIBRARY OF CONGRESS CATALOGING-IN-PUBLICATION DATA

Bhatia, Tasneem.

The 21-day belly fix: the doctor-designed diet plan for a clean gut and a slimmer waist / Tasneem Bhatia, M.D.

pages cm

title: Twenty-one-day belly fix

Includes bibliographical references.

ISBN 978-0-553-39364-4

eBook ISBN 978-0-553-39363-7

1. Weight loss. 2. Reducing diets. 3. Reducing exercises. 4. Digestive organs—Diseases—Treatment. I. Title. II. Title: Twenty-one-day belly fix.

RM222.2.B52 2014

613.25—dc23 2014029114

www.ballantinebooks.com

Book design by Casey Hampton

v3.1_r1

Writing this book was an act of pure joy because I was finally able to share my years of research and experience with you, the reader. I could not have done it without the help of both Julia Vantine and Rachel Meltzer Warren, M.S., R.D.N., who forced me daily to get my thoughts together. I want to thank my family for putting up with my crazy work and writing schedules, especially my sweet husband, Vik, and our children, Rania and Kubby. Finally, this book could not have been written without my patients, who ultimately are my teachers and force me to be better every day.

Tasneem Bhatia, M.D.

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Introduction

“It shouldn’t be this hard for me to lose weight.”

I hear this time and again from first-time patients. Often they have seen doctor after doctor before they arrive at my practice, which is one of the country’s leading holistic and integrative medical centers. More often than not, they don’t know why they can’t drop the pounds, despite their strenuous diet and exercise regimens. Equally confused are those who come to me with allergies, rashes, depression, migraines, overwhelming fatigue, or inability to conceive: Their specialists don’t have any answers, either.

I’ll never forget the day that one particularly frustrated patient walked into my office for the first time. My clinic, on a tree-lined street in Atlanta, is a warm place, with soft lighting, light music, and aromatherapy—earth tones dominate, so patients feel comfortable. It’s a safe space, and I encourage a dialogue. It’s not unusual for people to bring in their medical records, lists of medications, x-rays, and bags of supplements they’re taking. This patient, however, was unique. She brought in a stack of books—diet books.

“I have tried them all,” she declared in frustration, “and none have worked. I have fasted, detoxed, ‘gone Paleo’—nothing is working. I’m now fifty pounds overweight, and I have gained it all in the last three years!”

Concerned, I looked at her critically. She was in her late forties, her face was puffy and swollen, she had dark circles under her eyes, and most of her weight was centered in her abdomen. I understood her frustration—day after day, patient after patient, I am asked about weight and how to lose it. And I have the vantage point of seeing everyone—the active mom who wants to lose that last five pounds, the busy executive who has had too many business dinners, and the severely overweight, whose lifelong struggles have led to chronic diseases like diabetes, hypertension, metabolic syndrome, and cancer.

The struggle to shed weight has become an American story, with all of us affected, either personally or through a loved one fighting that battle.

I always listen quietly. But as I review their health questionnaires, ask follow-up questions about their diet and lifestyle, and perform their physical exams, I say the same thing time and again: “Let’s start with your gut.”

Here’s what I know: Nine times out of ten, my patients are “in the gutter”—my term for experiencing the effects of an out-of-whack digestive system.

Weight gain begins in the gut, and we now have the research to prove it. Altered gut microbiology—the wrong bacteria, yeast, or a damaged gut lining—leads to extra pounds. How? Well, for one, sugar cravings, carbohydrate addiction, and the desire for high-fat foods all begin in the belly: When our gut is damaged, our neurotransmitters are affected, making our body respond in kind. Carbs help give us a quick burst of serotonin, fats help us manage dopamine and norepinephrine, and sugar quickly boosts insulin and cortisol. And that’s why you reach for the Krispy Kremes. These quick fixes work, for a moment—until your body craves more, and you start the cycle all over again.

Let's go back to my patient with all her books. She had dieted, experimenting with different plans, and also alternated between starving and bingeing. The psychological toll of gaining weight triggered a depression, and she started isolating herself. Her clothes did not fit, and she was too ashamed to buy new ones.

Like many other patients, she had been approaching weight loss the wrong way. Diet and exercise do indeed help, but only if your gut, your hormones, and your stress levels are managed appropriately.

Together, we decided on starting the 21-Day Belly Fix, to begin rehabbing her belly as an initial step for weight loss. Following our plan, she removed gluten, lowered her sugar intake, and provided her belly with digestive enzymes, probiotics, and berberine—an herb I often use to treat candida, a fungus in the belly.

After her twenty-one days, she lost ten pounds, improved her insulin regulation, and noticed that her energy had increased dramatically. By sixty days, she had lost twenty-one pounds. A year later I saw her in the office, and she is back to her original size 6.

She got there not by dieting but by *fixing* her diet. She got there thanks to the 21-Day Belly Fix. And now, with this book, you can get there, too.

DIET-FREE WEIGHT LOSS? REALLY?

Yes, it's possible, with the 21-Day Belly Fix. The secret is in changing your gut's bacteria, making sure there's more "good" than "bad." By doing so, you'll not only lose weight and feel better, but you'll also be at the forefront of a new movement. You may have seen the recent headlines: "Bacteria in the Intestines May Help Tip the Bathroom Scale, Studies Show" touted the *New York Times* last year. "The Humble Heroes of Weight-Loss Surgery: Stomach Acids and Gut Microbes," trumpeted *National Geographic* this past March. "Increasingly, scientists, physicians, and the public are recognizing that the gut microbiota, the microbes that live within our intestines, shape our health and wellbeing in innumerable ways," reported the Harvard School of Public Health last year.

Gut health is hot right now. And for good reason: Gut health is *the key* to good health—and to losing weight.

On the 21-Day Belly Fix, you'll lose 10 pounds at least during the plan alone. But I call it "diet-free weight loss," because you'll continue to feel great long afterward due to your newly balanced bacteria. As a result, you will:

LOSE WEIGHT Your bacteria—not your lack of willpower!—may be responsible for your weight gain. Just last year, researchers found that a natural enzyme that keeps bad gut bacteria in check may be able to prevent obesity—and may be able to reverse it. Another study, from researchers at Cedars-Sinai Medical Center in Los Angeles, found that people with a greater amount of methane gas in their bodies—from methane-generating bacteria—digested their food more slowly and thus were gaining more weight than other people without even knowing it. Yes, *without even knowing it!* The whole premise of the 21-Day Belly Fix is to rebalance your gut bacteria so that your gut can help you burn calories, not add more!

REDUCE INFLAMMATION When the Harvard School of Public Health wrote that "the microbe

that live within our intestines shape our health and wellbeing in innumerable ways. They were referring specifically to a report that found that “chemicals generated by bacteria in the colon help important immune cells,” which reduced inflammation in mice. That means your irritable bowel syndrome, your bloating, your excess gas—could all be caused by the *wrong bacteria* in your gut.

SPEED UP METABOLISM This was big news last year: Scientists took two twin mice—obese, one thin—and transplanted their gut bacteria into sterile mice. “The lean bacteria went into the obese community, transforming it,” said Jeffrey Gordon, a microbiologist and director of the Center of Genome Science and Systems Biology at the Washington University School of Medicine in St. Louis. Meanwhile, the thin ones “increased the amount of fat in their body.” The findings established a direct link between your gut bacteria and how quickly you burn fat.

HELP YOUR DEPRESSION You usually think of depression starting in your head. But if you’re feeling low (and eating more as a result), the reason may be your gut. New research proves that altering your gut’s bacteria could influence your behavior: Mice with good belly bacteria were found to be less anxious in a recent study in *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences*, and I’ve seen the link in my own patients time and again. There’s a “brain” in your gut, and in *The 21-Day Belly Fix*, I’ll show you how to control it.

These findings are the result of years of research by scientists. But I’ve witnessed the healing effects firsthand for more than a decade, and I’m ready to share my secret with you. As you can see, the 21-Day Belly Fix won’t just help you stay thin. If you’re plagued by mysterious symptoms that impact your quality of life—depression, hair loss, diabetes—you, like my patients, are likely in the gutter. Many, many people end up there—even physicians. Even me.

“YOU NEED TO CLEAN YOUR BELLY”

I was twenty-eight, working as an ER physician in Atlanta, and sick—with what, I didn’t know. The onset of my symptoms was gradual but had grown steadily worse. No obvious digestive-system problems, but my hair was falling out, my skin was erupting with cystic acne, and my periods were irregular. I exercised aggressively but could not lose weight and was ten pounds heavier than I am today.

I didn’t yet know about the gut/health connection, and neither did the specialists I consulted. Each followed the same script. Step one: Run tests. Allergy tests. Blood tests. A biopsy of my scalp, which was quite painful.

None could offer a diagnosis. My symptoms were not “severe” enough, they said. Seriously? I was having my period once every two or three months. My hair was clogging the drain after every shower. That wasn’t “severe”?

The lack of a diagnosis didn’t stop them from proceeding to Step Two: Prescribe meds. The gynecologist wanted me on birth control pills to regulate my cycle. The dermatologist wanted me on a medication prescribed to men with enlarged prostates—and prescribed off-label to women with hair loss. This is a medication so potent that women who are pregnant or

childbearing age aren't even supposed to touch it.

Remember, I was twenty-eight. "If you don't take it, young lady, you'll be bald within a few years," the well-known, world-renowned dermatologist warned.

My allergist had nothing. My test results showed no allergies to either environmental allergens (things like dust and ragweed) or common foods like wheat or dairy. "Your diet has nothing to do with your symptoms," she said. I thanked her and left.

Unsatisfied and irritated didn't begin to describe my feeling about the treatment options I'd been offered. I felt lost. What was causing my symptoms? What was my body trying to tell me? Finding the answers would take almost a decade—and change the course of my health, my career, and my life purpose. The book you're holding, *The 21-Day Belly Fix*, is the result of that epic journey.

After three years of frustration and increasing alienation from my mainstream medical training, I began to study nutrition, alternative medicine systems, and holistic medicine, which treat the whole person in body, mind, and spirit.

In 2003, I was board-certified in holistic medicine and became a certified nutrition specialist in 2004. My studies had expanded my understanding of health and disease far beyond what I'd learned in medical school. But there *was* still more to learn. In 2006, I left Atlanta and headed to San Francisco to study Chinese medicine. Six years had passed since the onset of my symptoms, and my health puzzle was not yet solved. It was time to dig deeper.

My conventional training had taught me to meet symptoms with force—suppression is the goal. Now Chinese medicine was teaching me a different tack: healing the root causes of disease in addition to treating symptoms. Prevent symptoms, rather than react to them. How refreshing! The approach felt right to me.

One day, as we practiced diagnosing each other Chinese-medicine-style, the head professor—a small Asian man in his mid-seventies, bespectacled and stooped—stopped at my table regarding me intently. Taking a seat across from mine, he peered into my face, looked carefully at my tongue, and took my pulse. His whole body seemed to be listening to mine. I could feel his mind probing for weakness, for imbalance. Nervous, I held my breath.

Finally, he sat back. "Young lady," he said, in heavily accented English. "You have a very bad gut. Too much, too much dampness. You need to clean your belly."

My *gut*? What was he talking about? None of my previous medical training had connected my tortured skin, thinning hair, and missing-in-action periods to an unhealthy digestive system. But something told me that he was right.

My diet had to change, he said. I couldn't argue. For years now—all through the grind of medical school, residency, and twelve- and fourteen-hour shifts at the ER—"eating" meant peeling a wrapper or opening a box or bag. Processed food. Fast food. Junk. I would learn that sugar, grease, and white flour are the building blocks of a "damp diet." Even the *way* I was eating had promoted dampness. I either skipped meals or choked them down on the run.

My teacher prescribed a regimen of dietary changes and herbs to give my overburdened belly a rest. While it didn't magically resolve my symptoms, I began to feel better, to sleep better, to lose weight. I felt confident that I was on the right track. As my diet improved, I learned more about the power of nutrition and how it related to my symptoms. That study led me right back to the digestive system. I used my training in nutrition and traditional

Western systems of medicine to diagnose hypothyroidism and gluten sensitivity, a condition that occurs when you ingest a protein found in wheat, rye, barley, and a few other grains. Gluten intolerance can cause belly symptoms, like bloating and abdominal pain, as well as joint pain and depression. Again, these conditions circled back to the gut.

PHYSICIAN, HEALING HERSELF

During this healing period, my hair loss stopped, my skin cleared up, and my periods began to arrive each month and on time. I also married, completed a fellowship in integrative medicine at the University of Arizona in Tucson, had my children, and founded the Atlantic Center for Holistic and Integrative Medicine. By this time, fully healed, I was using the knowledge I'd gained from my own recovery to heal my patients. I still do.

I love what I do, and my practice just keeps growing. But why? I think its success suggests a frustration with mainstream medicine, which focuses on managing symptoms rather than getting to their roots. That's what medical school and residency trained me to do. That's what the specialists who initially treated me did. Mainstream physicians are taught to be reactive. For Symptom X, take or do Y.

But the human body isn't a flow chart. It's a dynamic organism. Its systems—cardiovascular, endocrine, reproductive, lymphatic, respiratory—are designed to work in harmony.

Above all, the body seeks balance. (*Homeostasis*, to use the medical term.) A disturbance in one system ripples through others. Ailments of the body affect the mind and emotions. And ailments of the mind, including stress, anxiety, and depression, promote disease, in large part by disrupting our self-care. We eat and sleep too much or too little, stop moving our bodies, chain-smoke, abuse alcohol, all of which undermines our physical health. Some of us take the opposite approach—read every health book, search Doctor Google to self-diagnose every health issue, jump into the latest fad diet.

Many mainstream physicians pay lip service to the mind-body connection, but not many walk the walk. They tell their patients to lose weight but not how to nourish their bodies. They advise stress management but aren't familiar with ancient relaxation techniques vetted by science. I believe that America's dismal state of health care (including exorbitant expenditures) stem from mainstream medicine's dismissal of traditional healing systems that counter the Western definitions of health and disease. These systems, thousands of years old, use vastly different (and decidedly low-tech) diagnostic tools. Even stranger to the Western model: They focus on vitality rather than disease.

Mainstream medicine's dismissal of alternative medicine systems borders on arrogance. And yet, among my colleagues, there's a quiet acknowledgment that million-dollar medical technologies and hundred-dollar pills have had a less-than-stellar success rate.

5 Reasons You're in the Gutter

Powered by junk food and stress, the Western lifestyle is putting the whammy on the American gut. Here are some of the top belly offenders.

Our nutrient-poor diet. Laden with sugar, fat, and refined grains, our junk-food diet discourages the microbial diversity that the digestive system requires for health. A century ago, people ate seasonally—what was growing in the ground in spring, summer, or fall ended up on their plates. Modern farming practices use less crop rotation and more chemicals, which deplete the soil of essential nutrients and microbes. Also, eating the same foods over and over (even healthy ones) or eating mostly processed foods creates an altered gut microbiology that can trigger inflammation and promote a leaky gut.

Mass-produced food. Yogurt in a tube. Frozen dinners. Ravioli in a can. Rotgut, all of it. Big Food has contributed to the disappearance of microbial diversity, triggering leaky guts and inflammation. Consider a common staple: packaged sandwich bread. Our grandmothers and great grandmothers made homemade bread from dough that was allowed to rise for a good long time. The longer bread dough ferments, the more varied bacteria it will contain.

Packaged bread has no microbial diversity. It may also be made with hybridized wheat—the price one pays for wheat that grows faster and resists drought and insects. Hybridized wheat contains new proteins not found in the earliest wheat strains. These new proteins may be playing a part in the rise of gluten intolerance and celiac disease.

Overuse of certain medications. Over-the-counter or prescription acid blockers, non-steroidal anti-inflammatory drugs (NSAIDs) such as common pain relievers, and overuse of antibiotics can damage the gut's intestinal lining.

Undiagnosed food allergies. Allergies to foods such as dairy, eggs, or corn can affect the gut, as can an intolerance to gluten.

Stress. Unmanaged chronic stress can contribute to an imbalance of gut bacteria and contribute to a leaky gut. And it can also cause changes in the gut's nervous system.

For me, the beauty of integrative medicine is that *this* system of medicine combines the best of *all* systems of medicine. I can take from them all and make an accurate diagnosis. And 75 percent of the time, it's gut-related.

GET THE GUTS TO BE HEALTHY

Once upon a time, everyone knew that the gut is the gateway to health. Hippocrates, the father of modern medicine, knew it, uttering that famous aphorism, “All disease begins in the gut.” American physician, health-food pioneer, and breakfast-cereal scion John Harvey Kellogg preached the healing power of good digestion, a vegetarian diet, and regular exercise. (Immortalized in the novel and film *The Road to Wellville*, Kellogg was also something of a kook, with some ideas that, it must be said, went too far.)

But over time, we've largely forgotten the gut's connection to health. As mainstream medicine became more and more fragmented and doctors started to specialize in just one system of the body, we lost sight of the holistic big picture. Our Western lifestyle compounds this oversight. A steady diet of processed food, chronic stress, medication overuse, chemicals in the air and water ... all of these place a toxic burden on the gut. While we love our

modern conveniences, the remote and the drive-through ushered in a new set of illnesses and an overweight but malnourished population.

And here we are. Fighting extra pounds and fatigue. Popping pain relievers and swigging pink liquids. Tired and stressed to the bone. People are knocking down my door to find the path to optimal health.

When I tell them that that path leads straight to the gut, they get skeptical. Especially when their bellies feel just fine.

But you don't have to have digestive complaints to be in the gutter. Yes, some illnesses cause belly symptoms like heartburn, constipation, diarrhea, and bloating. But there's no compelling evidence that ailments like food and environmental allergies, headache, insomnia, skin irritations, low energy, and low libido—and many others—have a gut connection too. Heal the gut, and more often than not these maladies improve or are resolved entirely.

As you'll learn, healthy digestion depends on two things: a balance of friendly bacteria in the gut and a strong intestinal lining. Medical research backs up this claim. Consider the recent findings:

- A Harvard study found that high-fat, high-sugar diets may alter the gut's bacterial diversity, perhaps contributing to chronic illness.
- The composition of the microbial “stew” in your gut may influence your ability to absorb nutrients from food and, thus, your tendency to gain weight.
- In animal studies, gut bacteria influence brain chemistry and behavior. This finding could help people with gastrointestinal diseases, such as irritable bowel syndrome (IBS), that are associated with anxiety or depression.
- Some psychiatric disorders, including late onset autism, may be associated with abnormal bacterial content in the gut.
- The presence of the *Prevotella copri* bacterium in the gut is linked to the chronic inflammatory disorder rheumatoid arthritis, suggesting that this “gut bug” may play a part in this and perhaps other autoimmune diseases.
- People diagnosed with type 2 diabetes had lower levels of a microbe called butyrate, and produced more bacteria in general than nondiabetics, a Chinese study has found. This bacterium seems to have a protective role against this chronic disease.

The good news: Regardless of your current health, the 21-Day Belly Fix can “fire up” your gut, helping to rebalance your gut bacteria and strengthen or heal your intestinal lining.

A NATION IN THE GUTTER

Think of the rain gutters attached to buildings. Their main job is to control the flow of rainwater from the roof to the ground to prevent damage to the foundation through erosion. Clean your gutters regularly, and all will be well. Let them accumulate years of debris, and they can overflow, damaging the foundation and washing away the needed soil.

It's the same with your gut. If you periodically clean it out, you protect your foundation—your health. If you don't, it gets clogged with toxins.

Without a doubt, the main cause of clogged guts is our Western lifestyle. There's a steady diet of processed foods, bereft of nutrients but brimming with chemicals. A lack of exercise—we move our bodies little or not at all. (Or we exercise too much, which can be just as harmful to the gut.) Chemicals in the air and water. Stress. Frantic schedules that leave no time to prepare and enjoy fresh, wholesome food.

As with rain gutters, it's actually easier to unclog your gut periodically than to deal with the potential consequences of *not* doing so (even if it never seems convenient). Unfortunately, few take the time to clean either their gutters or their guts. The manufacture of over-the-counter medications for digestive distress are making a fortune. But their products merely mask the symptoms of guts fouled with years of accumulated toxins and empty wallets: Americans spend more than \$100 billion a year on over-the-counter digestive aids—gas pills, antacids, and the like. The weight loss industry is also worth billions.

Digestive diseases, which include chronic constipation, gastroesophageal reflux disease (GERD), Crohn's disease, irritable bowel syndrome, and others—affect about 70 million Americans a year. It's estimated that up to 20 percent of Americans experience GERD symptoms—heartburn and reflux—once a week.

But those statistics are from 2004. A 2011 study published in the journal *Gut* suggests that GERD is on the rise. This one tracked more than thirty thousand people in Norway over eleven years. When it began, the prevalence of weekly heartburn and other symptoms of acid reflux was 11.6 percent. By the end, the prevalence had risen to 17.1 percent. That's a 49 percent increase! The potential cause of this stratospheric increase? Yet another epidemic you're likely familiar with: obesity.

The bottom line: Our guts are under siege. Chronic constipation, frequent diarrhea, an extra twenty pounds, constant heartburn, or abdominal pain that comes and goes are not symptoms to mask with pink liquids or pain relievers or diet books. They're warnings that the body is out of balance and on the path to disease.

Happily, more often than not, the gut forgives much—once it gets what it needs. But before you can feel good, lose weight, sleep soundly, have energy to burn, and actually resolve symptoms rather than cover them up with medications, you need to know what a healthy gut is. It's pretty simple. A healthy gut has two main characteristics: a balance of healthy bacteria and a strong intestinal lining. This was my guiding principle on my healing journey.

THE 21-DAY BELLY FIX BREAKTHROUGH

The 21-Day Belly Fix is the culmination of everything I've learned about the profound link between the gut and health. Blending ancient philosophies and techniques with the best of Western medicine and the latest in nutrition science, this 21-day program is designed to cleanse the belly of accumulated toxins. In just three weeks, it reprograms the digestive system, accelerates metabolism so you'll lose weight, and induces overall wellness.

Here's how this book is organized. Part 1 explores the workings of the digestive system and the interaction between it and other body systems. You'll learn more about that "second brain" too, as well as its profound effects on weight, mood, and sleep. Part 1 also reveals the major gut-depleters in your diet—sugar, fat, and refined grains—and expands on the keys to a maximized gut. And finally, you'll learn how to lose weight without dieting—the key to the plan.

Part 2 is the core, the food and lifestyle plan that is the 21-Day Belly Fix. On my regimen you'll nourish your body and gut with real, whole food—fruits and vegetables, yogurt and small amounts of fish and poultry, my nutrient-laden Green Juice Blends and fermented foods that provide a natural source of healthy bacteria. Think of the 21-Day Belly Fix as a spa vacation for your gut. See the calendar below; it will take you through the entire protocol.

The 21-Day Belly Fix

Day 1 Get out of the Gutter	Day 2	Day 3	Day 4 Plug Your Leaky Gut	Day 5	Day 6	Day 7 Build Your Bacteria
→			→			→
Day 8	Day 9	Day 10	Day 11 Solve Your Food Puzzle	Day 12	Day 13	Day 14
→			→			
Day 15	Day 16	Day 17	Day 18	Day 19	Day 20	Day 21 BELLY FIXED!
→						

Part 3 explores the roles of stress and physical activity in gut health and offers simple, practical ways to stress less and move more each day. (Good news—intense exercise is bad for the gut, while slow, gentle exercise is healing.) I also offer alternative therapies from Chinese medicine and Ayurveda to add to your 21-Day Belly Fix if you desire.

The plan sounds simple; it is simple. But don't underestimate its power. I've seen it work wonders in thousands of my patients frustrated by their pain, excess weight, blue moods, and fatigue.

I put them on the 21-Day Belly Fix and schedule them for a three-week follow-up. When they return, even those who were the most doubtful are amazed. "Dr. Taz, I'm a new person!" exclaim some of them. And indeed, I can see that before I even examine them. They radiate health and energy. Their skin is clearer and smoother, they've lost weight, and they walk in beaming.

Once I do my exam and run some tests, the internal changes become evident too. The levels of cholesterol and hemoglobin A1c (an indication of diabetes) have dropped. The hormone balance has shifted. And the markers of inflammation (such as homocysteine) have improved dramatically.

The 21-Day Belly Fix has put thousands of my patients on the path to long-term health and vitality, as they feel fit and shed pounds. I'm confident that it can put you on the same path.

The Fire in Your Belly

To understand how to lose weight with the 21-Day Belly Fix, you must first understand how the gut works so that you know what you're up against. And what you're up against is bacteria. As gross as it sounds, bacteria inhabit just about every part of your body, gut included. The tiny ecosystem in our bellies known as the gut microbiota contains tens of trillions of microorganisms. One third of your gut microbiota is common to most humans. Two thirds is specific to you, as unique as your fingerprint.

Under normal circumstances, this wide variety of gut bugs coexists peacefully, promoting proper digestive function, strong immunity, and overall vitality. But too many of the wrong bacteria, or not enough of the good ones, can have negative effects. This imbalance between the beneficial and harmful bacteria in the gut is known as *dysbiosis*—the opposite of symbiosis, which describes coexistence in a state of harmony.

Dysbiosis can make you feel nauseated, cause belly pain or bloating, or make you gassy (very gassy). Bowel movements change—you might have to “go” too much (diarrhea) or too little (constipation). You may also feel extremely tired; experience chronic pain from inflamed, aching joints; or feel mentally foggy. Sounds like fun, right?

The second characteristic of a healthy gut is a no-leak intestinal lining, the immune system's first line of defense. This lining looks like a net with very fine mesh. In a healthy gut, the holes are so tiny that only certain substances can pass through.

But if the lining is damaged, the holes get bigger. All sorts of undesirables—bacteria, viruses, yeast, undigested food particles—literally leak out of your small intestine into your bloodstream. The condition's formal name is “increased intestinal permeability,” but it's more commonly known as leaky gut. Leaky gut can also lead to low-grade, body-wide inflammation and digestive issues, skin problems like psoriasis, and autoimmune diseases. People with leaky guts may also develop food sensitivities, because partially digested particles of protein and fat leaking through the intestinal wall into the bloodstream causes an allergic response. They may also be less able to absorb nutrients. And they may gain weight. With a leaky gut, the symptoms are all over the map. Digestive symptoms such as gas, bloating, and diarrhea may make life miserable. Your skin may break out in acne or other rashes. Your mood might change, and you may feel either depressed or anxious. You might develop seasonal allergies or even asthma.

I've treated thousands of people with leaky guts. Before they come through my door, they've seen doctor after doctor, taken test after test, and their symptoms are still a mystery, both to them and to the specialists they see. Tellingly, most Western-trained doctors don't believe leaky gut exists. It's practitioners who embrace alternative medicine systems who

typically diagnose and treat it.

Here, let me touch briefly on the “second brain,” housed in your gut. Called the enteric nervous system, the gut-brain is wired to the head-brain, and they’re in constant communication. When all is well, the messages are quick updates. But if the gut is unhappy, it lets the brain know. A constant onslaught of negative messages from the gut can affect the nerve activity in the brain, leading to disturbances in mood and sleep.

But biology is only part of the 21-Day Belly Fix. The principles of Chinese medicine and Ayurveda are also very important to activating its full weight-loss potential.

YOUR DIGESTIVE FIRE

In your mind’s eye, picture a roaring campfire. See the tongues of flame leap skyward. Feel the warmth of the flames on your face, in your bones. Hear the snap, crackle, and pop.

Now, imagine that campfire at dawn. The air is chill and damp. The fire is out, or nearly so. No light, no heat. Only scraps of charred wood, a thin wisp of smoke twisting in the air.

A fire burning up whatever is thrown into it, efficiently (good!) versus a pile of cold embers that lets whatever is tossed on top sit and rot (bad!). Those images suggest the two primary states of the digestive system in two ancient systems of healing, Chinese medicine and Ayurveda, the traditional medicine of India.

What is digestive fire? Each system approaches it from a slightly different angle. [Chinese medicine](#) focuses on diet. The stomach, it says, is a cooking pot; the spleen, which rules digestion, is the fire underneath the pot. Warmed by the spleen, the stomach cooks and breaks down what we eat. Eat well, and you’ll feel well, because the food directly makes up our *qi*—our natural energy, a measure of our health and vitality.

Ayurveda, which originated in India almost three thousand years ago (see [this page](#)), teaches that within each of us is a digestive fire that converts food to energy, and it’s either in full blaze or a smoking pile of embers. A hot, bright blaze is the source of health, strength, nourishment, and energy. Yay! You must be eating a balanced diet. A smoky, smoldering fire weakens vitality, setting the stage for disease. Yikes. How many Dove Bars did you eat?

That rain-dampened campfire is the perfect way to picture chronic, low-grade inflammation in the body. Inflammation isn’t always bad. It’s part of the body’s immune response, a natural reaction to injury and outside invaders. But there are two types of inflammation: acute and chronic.

The acute kind of inflammation is a protective response to irritation, trauma, or infection. Say you get a splinter in your finger. The injured tissue sends out signals to open blood vessels and allow fluids to move from the vessels to the injured tissue. The fluid carries blood cells and other substances that help fight infection and begin the repair process. The familiar signs of inflammation—redness, swelling, and pain—are caused by the increase in fluids around the injured area.

Chronic inflammation is another story. It’s the damaging immune response caused by a variety of invaders including chemical toxins, food particles your gut can’t digest, and even too much body fat. Like that rain-dampened campfire, chronic inflammation smokes and smolders continually. And over time, it wears down your immune system, paving the way for disease.

Maybe you already know that studies link chronic inflammation to cancer and

cardiovascular disease. What you may not know is that it may play a role in Alzheimer's disease, celiac disease (CD), ulcerative colitis, Crohn's disease, the two most common types of inflammatory bowel disease (IBD), the debilitating autoimmune disease rheumatoid arthritis, and even obesity.

Both gut dysbiosis and a leaky gut trigger inflammation. Fortunately, the simple diet and lifestyle changes in the 21-Day Belly Fix help rebalance gut bacteria and seal a leaky intestinal lining, promoting good digestive health and quenching that smoldering, vitality-sapping inflammation. You can see how combining Western medicine with ancient medicine can benefit you.

AGNI AND AMA

In Ayurveda, the three doshas of vata, pitta, and kapha help form our unique constitution and they have a specific impact on bodily functions. Doshas are determined through medical history, exams, face readings, tongue and pulse readings, and personality assessments.

Furthermore, the doshas impact digestion, each in its unique way. That digestive fire I spoke of earlier? In Ayurveda, it's called *agni*. It's responsible for absorbing the nutrients that your body needs while burning off waste products. When agni is strong, your metabolism hums, your body systems (digestive and others) work well individually and together, and you feel physically and mentally well, strong, and calm. A weak agni means an unbalanced body and mind. You feel sluggish, your mood takes a nosedive, your systems begin to malfunction, your skin and hair grow dull, and your metabolism slows considerably, leading to weight gain.

A weak agni is caused by a buildup of *ama*—undigested food that forms a toxic sludge within your digestive system. Ama is thought to lead to disease over time. I find it notable that a healthy mix of gut bacteria corresponds to agni, while a strong gut lining is one benefit of reducing ama.

Signs of ama include bad breath, a coated tongue, constipation, fatigue, and depression. (In Ayurveda, the inability to “digest” emotions—anger, sadness, guilt—can produce just as much ama as undigested food. Think of it as emotional sludge—toxic emotions that you can't eliminate.) To correct ama, Ayurveda recommends an individualized system that incorporates diet, herbal remedies, lifestyle modifications, and purification of digestion through fasting and detoxification.

The Chinese-medicine version of ama is known as “dampness” or “excessive phlegm.” In these states, undigested food creates a sticky pudding-like mass in the body that causes “stagnation.” In the language of mainstream medicine, stagnation is the inability of nutrients and blood to help other organ systems. Stagnation leads to “cold,” which creates joint pain, constipation, hormone changes, and changes in mental health. Curing disease starts with correcting dampness or excess phlegm. The healing tools include herbs that relieve dampness, diet changes to reverse cold, and acupuncture to improve stagnation. All of these treatments strive to improve qi.

I love that these two ancient systems of medicine share the same goal: vibrant health rather than symptom or disease management. It's a positive goal and a departure from the Western model of medicine.

Combining all the models is what makes the 21-Day Belly Fix work. The practice of

integrative medicine is both art and science. This means that I rely on the diagnostic tools of Chinese and Ayurvedic medicine, based primarily on physical examination. But I confirm those diagnoses with conventional medical tests and add the latest breakthroughs in nutritional science to ancient healing diets.

Ayurveda 101

The word *Ayurveda* comes from two Sanskrit words: *ayur* (life) and *veda* (science or knowledge). Thus, this holistic system of medicine developed in India five thousand years ago is the science of life.

Mainstream medicine generally defines “good health” as the absence of disease. In Ayurveda, the definition is broader: a body, mind, and spirit in balance. The connection between balance and health trickled into mainstream medicine a few decades ago; Ayurveda identified it fifty centuries ago. This is the system of medicine Buddha used—high praise indeed.

Ayurvedic medicine centers on understanding a person’s unique constitution, or *prakriti*. It teaches that we, and the world itself, are made up of five elements: earth, air, fire, water, and space. Each of these elements has certain qualities. For example, fire is hot and transformational, while earth is solid and stable.

Ayurveda places these elements into three main energies called *doshas*. There is *vata* (air and space), *pitta* (fire and water), and *kapha* (earth and water). Most of us are a combination of doshas. When you’re treated by an Ayurvedic physician, his or her goal is to rebalance your body and mind and return you to your true constitution.

Here are characteristics of each dosha. Perhaps you will see yourself in one or two.

Pitta is derived from the Sanskrit word *pinj* (“to shine”). This dosha rules the small intestine and digestive and metabolic functions. Pitta-dominant people are typically aggressive achievers. They tend to have muscular builds, efficient metabolisms, and good appetites. Pitta is my dominant dosha, and I very much live up to this description!

In a figurative sense, pitta influences the ability to “digest” not just food but information, which we use to perceive the world. Pitta-dominant people are prone to nausea, vomiting, diarrhea, rashes, and anger. (Think about it—have you ever “acted rashly” in anger?) An excess of pitta can produce too much agni. To achieve balance, Ayurveda advises avoiding extreme heat and eating less spicy food.

Vata comes from the Sanskrit word *vayuu* (“that which moves”). Vata rules the colon and is seen as the force behind both pitta and kapha. Vata-dominant people are typically quick, alert, and restless. They may walk, talk, and think quickly, tend toward thinness, and be prone to nervousness or anxiety. Vata is believed to promote a balance between thought and emotion and to fuel creativity and clear comprehension.

Vata-dominant people tend to be susceptible to nerve disorders, insomnia, constipation, flatulence (oops), and arthritis. Unbalanced vata may show in the body as weight loss,

constipation, hypertension, arthritis, weakness, and digestive issues. Most of my patients with anxiety are vata-dominant. Intense, adrenaline-pumping exercise like running or training for marathons can raise that dominance even higher. This is not a good situation, because an imbalance of vata can weaken agni.

To balance vata, Ayurvedic physicians advise staying calm (practicing stress management, in modern lingo), getting sufficient rest, and avoiding extreme temperatures.

Kapha is derived from the Sanskrit word *shlish* (“that which holds things together”). This dosha rules the stomach and governs immunity. Kapha-dominant people typically have significant physical and psychological strength and stability. However, they tend to overnuture and give away all their energy to others.

Kapha-dominant people are susceptible to lethargy, depression, allergies, and asthma. To maintain balance, they are advised to eat lightly, get frequent exercise, and avoid naps.

To identify a person’s dosha (or doshas), an Ayurvedic physician examines their tongue, face, and eyes and takes their pulse. Then, he or she prescribes treatments and routines tailored to his or her prakriti and dosha. These might include diet and exercise recommendations, herbs, massage, and meditation.

It’s fun to take one of those “What’s your dosha?” quizzes on the Internet. But the complexities of Ayurveda can’t be reduced to a quiz online, and only a trained practitioner can identify doshas accurately.

Chinese Medicine 101

I have studied many systems of medicine, but Chinese medicine may be my favorite. Maybe it’s because this system has harnessed the healing power of nature in a complex and elegant system of protocols that has been used to enhance wellness and treat disease for over 2,500 years.

Chinese medicine is based on several core principles and concepts, including the one on which I founded my integrative practice: The health of mother and child are intimately connected. Here are other important concepts you need to know.

1. *Qi*. A vital “life energy” flows through us. This energy, *qi* (pronounced “chee”), travels along “pathways” in our bodies called meridians. If the flow of *qi* along these meridians becomes unbalanced or blocked, illness can occur. Causes of *qi* imbalance can involve lifestyle factors, such as poor diet or too little sleep, as well as stress, chronic illness, and excess medication intake.
2. *The Five Elements*. The Five Elements—earth, fire, wood, metal, and water—are aspects of *qi*, and they represent everything in the universe. They also explain how our bodies function and how disease changes that functioning. We shift through all of these elements over the

course of our lives. However, one element typically dominates, and we can be “typed” by that element. Chinese medicine doctors use pulse and tongue and face reading to type their patients as well as to diagnose their health.

3. *Yin and yang*. All things, our bodies included, are made of two opposing but complementary forces: *yin* and *yang*. In Chinese medicine, hot versus cold (yin vs. yang) is vitally important. To maintain health and prevent illness, the body’s balance of yin and yang must be maintained or restored.
4. As in Ayurvedic medicine, Chinese medicine treats the whole person—body, mind, and spirit. Its object is to help qi flow smoothly through the body’s meridians and to restore yin-yang balance. This balance creates vitality and good health and helps to prevent or treat disease.
5. Chinese medicine doctors use a variety of methods. These include:
 1. *Diet*. Balancing our consumption of foods that are “cold” (yin) and “hot” (yang) helps to balance the flow of qi. “Cold” and “hot” refer not to the temperature of these foods but to their effects on the body. You eat the proper balance of “cold” and “hot” foods for you.
 2. *Chinese herbal medicine*. The Chinese *Materia Medica*, a pharmacological reference book, describes thousands of medicinal substances, mostly plant leaves, roots, stems, flowers, and seeds. Often, practitioners combine them in formulas and prescribe them in teas, capsules, liquid extracts, and powders. Many of my patients bring their customized herbal medicines from their Chinese medicine practitioners to my office—bags of crushed, dried white peony petals or spicy-sweet powdered ginger root from which they make tea or soup, bottles of herbal blends steeped in alcohol (called tinctures), syrups made from wood bark, dandelion leaves, milk thistle flowers.
 3. *Acupuncture*. The body’s meridians are dotted with specific points through which qi can be accessed. Inserting thin, solid, metal needles at these points releases qi, freeing it to flow throughout the body. As a licensed acupuncturist, I have used this technique to treat all kinds of conditions, including abdominal pain and IBS.
 4. *Acupressure*. An alternative to acupuncture, acupressure also moves qi. Practitioners apply direct pressure to points along the body’s meridians using their hands or fingers or tape magnets, seeds, or even rocks over acupuncture points. I use acupressure to help my patients manage stress, quell the nausea of pregnancy, quit smoking, or manage overeating.
 5. *T’ai chi*. This ancient Chinese system of exercise combines dance-like movements with breathing and relaxation. The specific movements are considered to move qi. I often recommend t’ai chi to older patients, patients who are not ready for moderate-intensity workouts but who would benefit from exercise.

If you're interested in experiencing Chinese medicine for yourself, I recommend finding a practitioner who is licensed, certified, and experienced. The United States accredits schools in Chinese medicine, so search for a practitioner certified by an accredited school and licensed by your state.

Also, as ancient Chinese and Ayurvedic healers did, I view each patient as unique—a fusion of inborn traits and external choices and habits that, together, affect their health. Their unique qualities suggest the appropriate treatments. In some patients, symptoms of a dosha imbalance are very apparent. In others, it's the symptoms of blocked qi, dampness, or heat that leap out at me. Sometimes, I use acupuncture, acupressure, or Chinese herbs to return the body to balance. And sometimes, it's the healing foods of Ayurveda (kitchari, ghee, ginger) or the Ayurvedic practices of yoga and abdominal massage that bring relief.

You, too, are unique. The strength of the 21-Day Belly Fix program is that it's designed around treatments that are healing for the majority of my patients. Used in combination, each treatment—diet, herbs, supplements, exercise, stress management—is far more powerful than it is in isolation. Together, they return the body to balance, and balance is the 21-Day Belly Fix's overriding goal.

The key to a 21-Day Belly Fix success is identifying your unique food story, understanding your dosha and your Chinese meridian diagnosis, rebuilding your gut bacteria, and identifying your core gut issues. In our practice, we use Chinese medicine pulse and tongue reading, meridian analysis, Ayurvedic pulse readings, and conventional patient histories and physical exams, along with measuring pH and running blood tests to help nail the diagnosis. In this book, you benefit from the combined wisdom of thousands of patients seen in my practice and successfully treated using this approach.

HOW BADLY DO YOU NEED A 21-DAY BELLY FIX?

Based on core principles of nutrition, Chinese medicine, Ayurveda, and Western medicine, this simple yes-or-no quiz can help you gauge your level of ama. Note the response that best describes you, awarding yourself one point for every yes answer and zero points for a no response. The more yeses you have, the higher the likelihood that you're in the gutter.

Face

In Chinese and Ayurvedic medicine, your face reveals your health. Ama, dampness, and stagnation show up on your face—and often, cosmetics can't hide them.

1. You have dark circles under your eyes. Y

2. You have rashes that are red and irritated (includes acne, eczema, rosacea, or any red irritation). Y
3. Your face is puffy or swollen. Y
4. Your tongue has a white or yellow coating. Y
5. Your skin color is/has been described as pale or dull. Y

Energy Level

Are you often fatigued and mentally foggy? Do you joke about “carb comas”? The health of your gut and the health of your diet can dramatically affect your energy levels. If you’ve ever done a detoxification diet, you know that it makes your energy skyrocket. Just a few days into your 21-Day Belly Fix, your energy level will soar.

6. You are tired after you eat. Y
7. You often suffer from “brain fog.” Y
8. You get sick more than four times per year. Y

Digestive Symptoms

I am always surprised how many of my patients dismiss these. Perhaps it’s because they have come to depend on over-the-counter medications to relieve them. The 21-Day Belly Fix gets to the root of these symptoms, healing them gently but for good.

sample content of The 21-Day Belly Fix: The Doctor-Designed Diet Plan for a Clean Gut and a Slimmer Waist

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