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## IEHA Program Lesson Submission

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| <b>Month/Year Materials Created:</b>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                           | April 2026                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                    |
| <b>Topic Title:</b>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                            | Healthy Habits for a Healthy Gut                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                              |
| <b>Topic Description:</b><br>(Information should be researched, educational, approved for use (if you are not the author, seek approval from materials author), and presented in a format that would allow an individual to read, study, and teach to other peers. All copyright issues should be resolved before submission.) | This lesson focuses on simple, research-based habits that support a healthy gut. Gut health is shaped by daily habits. Eating fiber-rich and prebiotic foods, along with managing stress and maintaining variety, supports a healthy microbiome and reduces chronic disease risk.                                                                             |
| <b>Short Goal/Objective Statement for Lesson:</b>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                              | Participants will: <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Understand the role of the gut microbiome in overall health.</li><li>• Define probiotics and prebiotics and their role in gut health.</li><li>• Identify 3-5 habits that support a healthy gut.</li><li>• Apply simple strategies to improve gut health and reduce chronic disease risk.</li></ul> |

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## Healthy Habits for a Healthy Gut

30–40 Minute Lesson Plan

### Learning Objectives

Participants will:

- Understand the role of the gut microbiome in overall health
- Define probiotics and prebiotics and their role in gut health
- Identify 3–5 habits that support a healthy gut
- Apply simple strategies to improve gut health and reduce chronic disease risk

### Introduction (5 minutes)

**Icebreaker: “What foods make your stomach feel your best—or your worst?”**

**By the end of this lesson, participants will learn:**

- The gut microbiome includes trillions of microorganisms in the digestive tract.
- These microbes influence digestion, immunity, and overall health.
- Gut health is linked to chronic disease prevention.

#### 1. Fast Fact:

- The majority of gut bacteria live in the large intestine and play essential roles in health (Clifford & Weir, 2025)

#### 2. Understanding the Gut Microbiome (5–7 minutes)

- A **microbiome** is the micro-organisms present on and in the human body, along with functions they perform. The gut microbiome helps to break down food for nutrient absorption and support immune function. A balanced microbiome supports digestion and reduces inflammation.
- **Dysbiosis** is an imbalance of gut bacteria. It is associated with obesity, diabetes, and gastrointestinal issues.
- Gut health is more than just good digestion. It affects overall wellness and a healthy microbiome prevents chronic disease.

#### 3. Key Concept: Prebiotics vs. Probiotics (5 minutes)

- **Prebiotics** are types of fiber that feed beneficial gut bacteria. They are not digested by humans but are fermented by gut microbes. They act as fertilizers to good bacteria in your digestive system. Prebiotics promote growth of beneficial bacteria and improve digestion and gut balance.

- Examples of prebiotic foods are garlic, onions, bananas (especially slightly green), asparagus, whole grains, and beans and lentils.
- In contrast, **probiotics** are live beneficial bacteria found in foods. These are good bacteria that help digestion, build the immune system, and create a healthy microbiome. Probiotics are found in fermented foods, such as yogurt, kefir, sauerkraut, and kimchi. You may discuss a probiotic supplement with your healthcare provider.
  - Key Teaching Point:
    - *Prebiotics feed good bacteria; probiotics add more good bacteria*

### **Healthy Habit #1: Eat a High-Fiber, Plant-Rich Diet (8 minutes)**

- Dietary fiber is the foundation of gut health. Diets rich in plant foods support a healthy microbiome. Many high-fiber foods are also rich in prebiotics. Fiber is found in whole plant foods, such as fruits and vegetables, whole grains, legumes, and nuts and seeds. For someone on a 2,000-calorie diet, 28 grams of fiber is needed. Check food labels for amounts of fiber in frequently eaten foods.
- A high fiber diet has the benefit of increased microbial diversity, improved digestion, lower inflammation in the body, and lower chronic disease risk.

### **Healthy Habit #2: Include Prebiotic and Fermented Foods (5 minutes)**

- Support your gut by both feeding and adding beneficial bacteria. Prebiotic foods nourish existing bacteria. Fermented foods may introduce beneficial microbes. A practical tip is to combine both pre- and probiotic foods. For example, eat yogurt (probiotic) + banana (prebiotic) in the same meal.

### **Healthy Habit #3: Manage Stress (5 minutes)**

- Stress affects gut health. Chronic stress can disrupt gut bacteria balance. Stress increases inflammation and reduces beneficial microbes and increases harmful pathogens. Additionally, when under stress, many people find comfort in high sugar and fat treats, which causes further stress to the intestinal tract.
- To combat the negative impact of stress, increase physical activity. Get adequate sleep and practice relaxation techniques.
  - Question: What are some helpful tips you use to combat stress?

### **Healthy Habit #4: Use Antibiotics Wisely (4 minutes)**

- Antibiotics impact gut bacteria. Antibiotics kill both harmful and beneficial bacteria. Recovery of the microbiome can take time. As a result, only use when prescribed. Support gut health afterward with fiber-rich foods

### Healthy Habit #5: Eat a Variety of Foods (4 minutes)

- A diet rich in a variety of whole foods supports a diverse microbiome. Different foods support different bacteria and have the added benefit of providing a wider variety of vitamins and minerals. Diversity also improves resilience and gut balance.
- A practical step towards eating a variety of foods is to “eat the rainbow.” Incorporate many different colors of fruits and vegetables to increase diverse vitamins and minerals in the diet. In addition, rotate plant-based foods, including legumes and whole grains.

### Wrap-Up & Action Steps (3–5 minutes)

- Review Key Habits:
  - Eat a fiber-rich, plant-based diet
  - Include prebiotic and fermented foods
  - Manage stress
  - Use antibiotics wisely
  - Eat a variety of foods
- Reflection Question: “What is one prebiotic or fiber-rich food you will add this week?”

### Key Takeaway

- Gut health is shaped by daily habits. Eating fiber-rich and prebiotic foods, along with managing stress and maintaining a diet of a variety of foods, supports a healthy microbiome and reduces chronic disease risk.

### References

- Clifford, J., & Weir, T. (2025). *The gut microbiome and health* (Reviewed August 2025). Colorado State University Extension.  
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