

Try our custom yoga practice for gut health [VIDEO] + get a bonus Phase 1 recipe.



Hi VitalPlan,

When you consider **Vital Plan’s five essential elements for optimal overall health—Nourish, Purify, Calm, Activate, and Balance**—good nourishment is the most effective of the bunch for enhancing digestive health specifically.

Which makes sense, given your diet offers direct access to your gut.

That said, **the right diet alone isn’t enough**. To have a truly calm, healthy gut, employing all five elements is not only necessary, it will also accelerate your results.

Which is why today, we’d like to focus on a different essential element—**Activate—and the importance of incorporating exercise into your regular routine**.

Try this Short Yoga Practice for Gut Health »

You might be thinking, “My gut hurts—a 5-mile run or kickboxing class is the last thing I need!” We totally agree. Overly intense exercise can actually create stress and strain on your digestive system.

A better bet: **Light exercise that’s gentle on your body**, but still helps increase your blood flow and respiration, and tone digestive tissues.

Here’s how gentle activity supports digestive function, detoxification, and normal bowel movements:

- Exercise helps **promote activity in the parasympathetic nervous system, aka, the**

rest and digest system. This system works to increase intestinal and glandular activity and relax sphincter muscles in the GI tract. It also **helps us manage stress**—a prerequisite to good digestion, and a topic we'll cover more in a future email.

- Moving your body **helps increase blood flow and oxygenate the tissues** in your digestive organs, which helps optimize their function.
- Exercise **supports digestion on a mechanical level** by pushing, pulling, compressing, and gently wringing out the GI tract. It also serves to **strengthen the muscles of the abdomen and stimulate the intestinal muscles**, which help move contents through the digestive system faster and more easily.

DID YOU KNOW?

With each breath you take in, your diaphragm—a dome-shaped muscle located in the lower ribs—contracts downward, gently massaging the digestive organs in your abdomen. This promotes motility, and may enhance digestive secretions.

Deep breathing also activates the “rest and digest” aspect of your nervous system, encouraging your body to relax. Experience these benefits firsthand in our 20-minute guided yoga practice for gut health.

- Your gut microbiome—the sum of all the microbes that inhabit your oral cavity, esophagus, stomach, intestines, and colon—influences everything about you, including your digestive health. Which means **keeping your microbiome balanced is key to gut health**. And in fact, recent studies suggest that exercise can help balance the microbiome by enhancing both the number and diversity of beneficial microbes.
- Exercise increases your body temperature, which **promotes better breakdown of food**. Think of it as stimulating your digestive “fire.”

Fortunately, there are many forms of gentle, low-impact exercise you can do to support your gut health, including walking, biking, swimming, tai chi, and yoga.

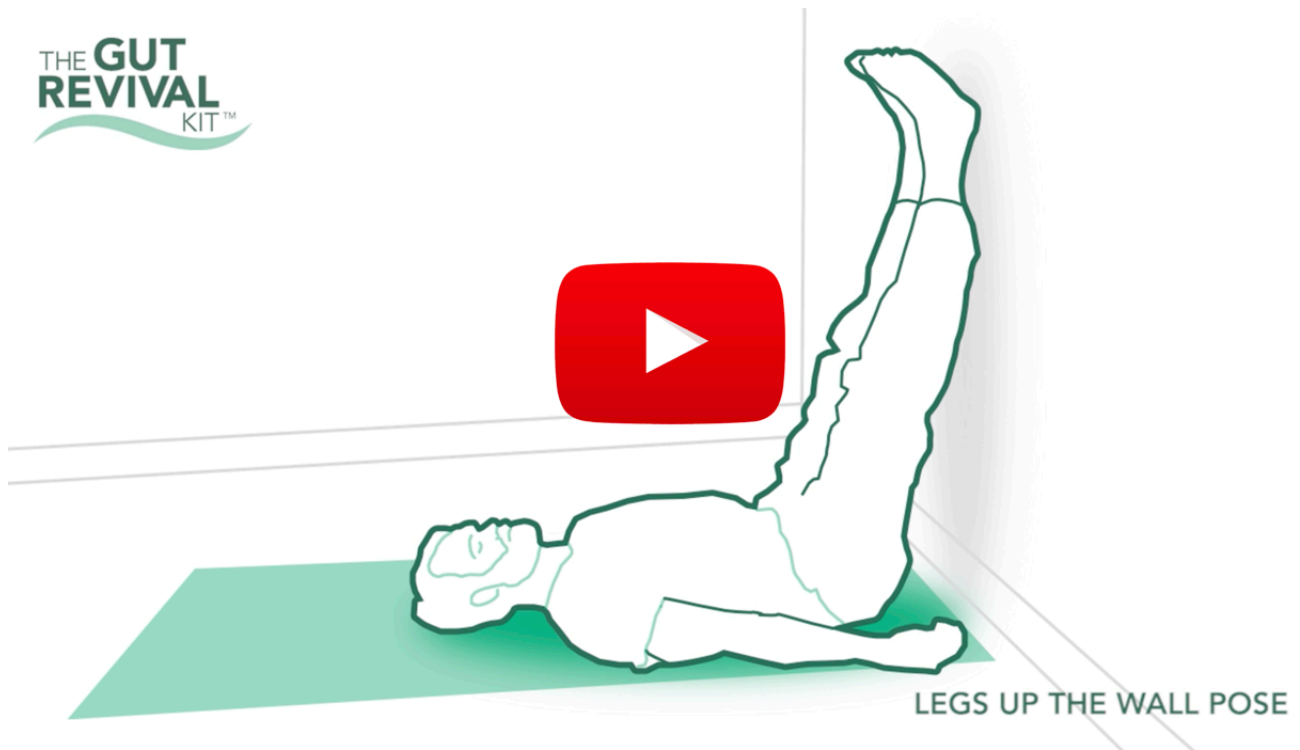
To help you get started, we asked yoga teacher Tim Yarborough, Vital Plan's Wellness Director, to develop a **20-minute Yoga for Gut Health practice**, below.

This sequence is **simple and accessible to beginners**. If you don't have a yoga mat, a blanket will do just fine.

We recommend practicing it **at least three times a week** to support your gut health. It's generally **best to wait for two hours after a meal before you exercise**; avoid exercising on a full stomach.

As with any new physical activity, be sure to consult your healthcare provider before you begin, especially if you have heart issues, high blood pressure, back injuries, or other health concerns.

Click on the image below for Tim's Yoga Practice for Gut Health



Remember, exercise shouldn't take the place of diet—for best results, add regular movement to your gut health toolbox, and continue to stick with the Vital Plan Diet.

For a little healthy-eating inspiration, **here's a delicious new Phase 1 recipe that's not included in The Vital Plan Diet:**

Leek, Asparagus, and Shiitake Sauté

This quick and simple side is loaded with prebiotic fiber. With the earthy meatiness of the mushrooms, it can also make for a great vegetarian entrée.

Serves 6 as a side dish; 2-3 as a entrée

Ingredients:

- 3 tbsp olive oil
- 2 leeks, tough green parts discarded, sliced
- 2 cloves garlic, minced
- 2 handfuls of shiitake (or other) mushrooms, stems removed, wiped, and sliced
- 2 lbs asparagus, trimmed and cut into 1-inch pieces

- ½ tbsp fresh thyme, minced (or ½ tsp dried)
- Sea salt

Instructions:

1. Cut off root end of leeks leaving 1-inch of green. Cut in half lengthwise, and wash well—dirt likes to hide between the layers, so be sure to peel them back and rinse thoroughly with water.
2. In a large skillet over low to medium heat, heat oil. Add leeks and garlic and sauté, stirring frequently, until soft, 3-5 minutes.
3. Add mushrooms, asparagus, thyme, and a couple dashes of salt; stir to incorporate the seasonings.
4. Cover and cook over low to medium heat, stirring occasionally, until asparagus is tender, 15-20 minutes. Season to taste with salt.

Change it Up: Enjoy this dish with different flavors: try basil or 1 tsp anchovy paste instead of thyme.

Food Hack: To discard the tough part of the asparagus spear without wasting any of the tender edible part, break each spear by hand at its natural breaking point. The spear will naturally give at the point of the stalk where it becomes tender.

Serving Suggestions: Got leftovers? Toss them in with some broth and either fish or poultry. In Phase 2, this dish is excellent served with any style of eggs!

Stay tuned for the next email in this series, where we'll delve deeper into the gut microbiome. This crucial yet often misunderstood "mini-ecosystem" requires your attention if you truly want to turn your digestive health around.

Yours in health,



Dr. Bill Rawls

Vital Plan is a company devoted to enhancing wellness through education, support, and herbal supplements.

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