

THE BLOATING CURE

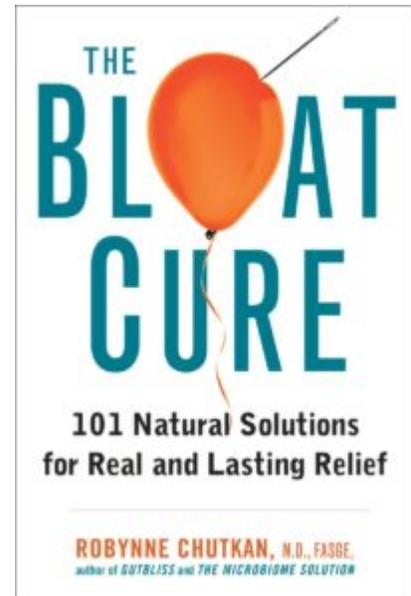
By Naomi Wahls Posted May 25, 2016 In Blog

In the late 1950s, Professor David Strachan, a lecturer at the London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine, was tasked with figuring out why rates of hay fever and eczema were skyrocketing in British children. These conditions (as well as others in the autoimmune family like diabetes and celiac disease), had been steadily increasing since the turn of the century, when droves of Brits left the farm for the factory.

Strachan followed seventeen thousand children from birth to adulthood, and uncovered two startling and unexpected associations: hay fever and eczema were *rare* in large families with multiple siblings and lots of early childhood infections; and *common* in affluent households with loftier standards of personal hygiene. These findings were counter to everything we thought we knew about germs. Could exposure to more germs really be better for us? And could living a cleaner lifestyle be making us sicker?

If we look at a map of the world today, one of the striking observations is that autoimmune illnesses like MS as well as gastrointestinal complaints like Crohn's disease and bloating are common in developed countries and rare in less developed ones. Strachan's "hygiene hypothesis" accounts for this uneven distribution by suggesting that *less* childhood exposure to bacteria and viruses in affluent societies like the United States and Western Europe actually *increases* susceptibility to disease by suppressing the natural development of the immune system.

We need interaction with dirt and germs to train our immune system how to respond appropriately to stimuli in our environment—what to react to and what to ignore. Inadequate exposure leads to defects in immune tolerance and a trigger-happy state of heightened activity where essential bacteria, proteins in food, and even parts of our own body are treated like the enemy and attacked. Increased permeability of the gut lining and a bloated belly frequently ensue as previously sequestered substances make their way through the lining and into the bloodstream.



Not surprisingly, as countries become more industrialized and their level of sanitation improves, the prevalence of these conditions increases dramatically. Economic growth and development may improve quality of life, but they bring with them practices like chlorinated drinking water, industrial agriculture, and overuse of antibiotics, which limit our exposure to germs and can lead to a tangible decline in health.

Since our internal microbial landscape is in large part determined by our external environment, it's not surprising that when we super sanitize our surroundings we also destroy many of the microbes in our gut that keep us healthy and bloat-free. In the last century alone, we've destroyed more than 80 percent of the earth's forests, fully exploited or depleted 70 percent of the world's fish, and lost half of the wild animals on the planet. We're in the midst of the worst species die-off since the dinosaurs disappeared, losing animals at a rate thousands of times faster than what should naturally be occurring. The loss of species and their natural habitats leads to an imbalanced ecosystem in which drought, famine, and global warming become part of the normal landscape. Species further down on the food chain grow out of control when their natural predators are diminished, and huge ecological gaps develop when unsound environmental practices become a way of life.

In conservation biology, "rewilding" means the reintroduction of species into areas where they've become extinct, with the goal of returning to a more natural and balanced existence. It's an important part of repairing and restoring our relationship with the natural world—not just the one we live in but also the one that lives inside us. Just as conservation efforts of reforestation, protecting wildlife, and replenishing the oceans are essential to life on the planet, so re-creating a balanced microbial habitat in our bodies might be the single most important step in improving our individual and collective health.

But how exactly do we rewild ourselves? What do we need to do to restore and maintain a densely populated, healthy microbiome, with the right mix of species all working together? Is it possible to provide nourishing food for our gut bacteria without having to grow it all ourselves? Can infections be treated or prevented without antibiotics? What about modern practices that make our lives convenient and comfortable but wipe out legions of essential bacteria in the process? Is it possible to get back to a dirtier, healthier way of life, while still living in the modern world?

Removing medications, practices, and foods that are damaging to your microbiome; *replacing* the essential bacteria that you've lost with a robust probiotic; and *restoring* the health of your gut with appropriate nutrients, supplements, and medicinal foods are key elements of this rewilding philosophy. If you've been diagnosed with an autoimmune disease, struggle with your weight, or are looking to deflate your bloat, achieving optimal microbial health through diet and lifestyle changes may be just the answer you've been looking for. Find out more in *The Bloat Cure: 101 Natural Solutions for Real and Lasting Relief*

About the Author:

Robynne Chutkan, M.D., is one of the most recognizable gastroenterologists working in America today. Dr. Chutkan has a B.S. from Yale and an M.D. from Columbia, and is a faculty member at Georgetown University Hospital and the founder of the Digestive Center for Women. An avid snowboarder, marathon runner, and Vinyasa yoga practitioner, she is dedicated to helping her patients live not just longer, but better, lives.

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