



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

By Dr. Tasneem Bhatia



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A leading integrative physician shares a groundbreaking 21-day eating plan to shed pounds, accelerate metabolism, balance your digestive system, improve gut function, and feel better every day—without dieting!

There are one hundred trillion reasons losing weight and staying healthy are so hard: That's the number of bacteria living in your digestive system—good bugs and bad that influence everything from how much fat you store to whether or not you'll get arthritis, diabetes, or Alzheimer's.

As medical director of the Atlanta Center for Holistic and Integrative Medicine, Tasneem Bhatia, M.D., is an expert in unlocking the mystery of the gut and probiotic health. Combining the latest research and cutting-edge science with proven alternative nutritional remedies, Dr. Taz has developed **a simple plan**—one that has worked for thousands of her own patients—that aims to reprogram your digestive system, help fight disease, and strip away pounds in just 21 days! *The Belly Fix* accelerates metabolism, increases energy, and jump-starts weight loss immediately. Once “fixed,” you'll continue to feel the benefits.

Drop pounds on the 21-Day Belly Fix plan, with more to come, as you continue to follow the program designed to balance your digestive bacteria and put you on the path to long-term health and vitality.

Speed up your metabolism with the help of research that proves a direct link between your gut bacteria and how quickly you burn fat.

Reduce inflammation and rebalance your body to help fight diabetes, arthritis, Alzheimer's, skin disorders, and more.

Find focus and clarity with the help of simple and delicious foods that feed the healthy microorganisms in your gut—and fight the bad ones!

The 21-Day Belly Fix is the final word on what researchers call your “second brain” and the simple ways that fixing your diet—instead of committing to a long-term food-banishing plan—can get your gut out of the gutter and help you to start feeling great. With delicious recipes and easy swaps, *The 21-Day Belly Fix* is **the ultimate weight-loss plan!**

Praise for *The 21-Day Belly Fix*

“If you are tired of feeling bloated and blah, let *The 21-Day Belly Fix* be your guide to good gut health and a slim waistline. This splendid book is truly a treasure, and Dr. Taz is one the of the nation’s leading experts on integrative medicine.”—**Gerard E. Mullin, M.D.,** associate professor of medicine, Johns Hopkins, and author of *The Inside Tract* and *Integrative Gastroenterology*

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Editorial Review

Review

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About the Author

Tasneem Bhatia, M.D., is a board-certified physician, the founder and medical director of the Atlanta Center for Holistic and Integrative Medicine, and a fellow at the Arizona Center for Integrative Medicine of the University of Arizona (led by Dr. Andrew Weil). Best known as Dr. Taz, M.D., she has been featured on *The Dr. Oz Show*, *Today*, *Live with Kelly and Michael*, CNN, and the Weather Channel and was a contributing editor and columnist for *Prevention*. She currently serves as a health expert for Mom Corps YOU and Cancer Treatment Centers of America and is an associate professor at Emory University. She resides in Atlanta, Georgia.

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The Fire in Your Belly

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o 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 bad 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 is 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 (see page 8) 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 page 6), 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 fluid 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, 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 constitutions, 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 the 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 or 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.

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. These 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 readings, 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. Circle 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.

9. You do not have a bowel movement every day. ?y?

10. You have abdominal pain more than twice a month. ?y?

11. You experience gas or bloating after a meal. ?y?

12. You have loose, unformed stools three or more times per week. y?

13. Your stools float, rather than sink to the bottom of the toilet. ?y?

Diagnosed Health Conditions

Circle the condition(s) you have been diagnosed with. They may be connected to microbial imbalances in your gut or a leaky intestinal lining, even if your symptoms don't affect your belly.

14. Chronic allergies or asthma ?y?

15. Hormone imbalances ?y?

16. Infertility ?y?

17. Anxiety or depression ?y?

18. Chronic vitamin B12 or iron deficiency ?y?

Family History

Circle the condition(s) that run in your family. There's good evidence that genetic predisposition is one factor in the conditions listed below. For example, relatives of people who have IBD have at least a tenfold increased risk for the disease.

19.Colon or breast cancer?y?

20.Inflammatory bowel disease (IBD)?y?

21.Irritable bowel syndrome (IBS)?y?

Medications

Many of my patients come to me believing that medications are the answer—but they can cause more problems than they solve. Often, I can resolve the root of their ailments with simple, natural treatments.

22.You use ibuprofen or other pain relievers more than 3 times per week.?y?

23.You use antacids or reflux medications more than 3 times per week.?y?

Weight

When there's a doughnut shop or fast-food restaurant on every corner, it's not hard to gain weight. But an imbalanced gut may add fuel to our obesogenic environment. Evidence suggests that the gut microbiota may play a role in the development of obesity and that eating a healthy diet encourages microbes associated with leanness to become incorporated into the gut.

24.I continue to gain weight despite positive lifestyle changes.?y?

25. I tend to lose weight or have a hard time keeping it on. ?y?

Scoring

0–8 points: Outstanding! Your agni is in full blaze (something I rarely see in first-time patients). To keep your digestive fire burning hot and bright, follow the 21-Day Belly Fix twice a year.

9–16 points: Wake-up call! You may feel fine now, but at some point your digestive fire will begin to sputter and smoke. The resulting cold or dampness throughout your body will rob you of your vitality and increase your risk of disease. The 21-Day Belly Fix can reverse this trend—if you start now.

17–25 points: You may be struggling with a multitude of symptoms, which may or may not be causing digestive issues. But it's never too late to get out of the gutter! Schedule an appointment with your doctor. Bring this book and get the green light to follow the 21-Day Belly Fix. Coupled with a doctor's care, this program can help rebalance your gut bacteria, strengthen your intestinal lining, and clean your gut of its accumulated toxins, which are likely at the root of your symptoms.

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Michael Miller Production Manager

Scribe Inc.

www.scribenet.com

main telephone: 215.336.5094

direct telephone: 267.507.1304

facsimile: 215.336.5092

7540 Windsor Drive Suite 200B, Allentown PA 18195

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