

## Keep a healthy gut

Written by Gerald W. Deas M.D., MPH, Special to the NNPA from the New York Amsterdam News  
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The only time that you know you have a gut is when it either growls or cramps up, causing pain. Oh, there's another time you know you have a gut. It's when you look down and can't see your knees. That's really not an enlarged gut, but a collection of fat in the wall of the abdomen. The abdomen is filled with many organs such as the liver, spleen, pancreas and stomach. However, the gut occupies most of the space in the abdomen.

From the time partially digested food leaves the stomach, it begins its long journey through the gut until whatever is left is eliminated with a bowel movement. After leaving the 23 feet of small intestines, the mess enters the large gut. Speaking of mess, I remember that in the hood, when someone called you a mess, it was not a compliment. A statement such as "Child, you sure are a mess" was a common greeting when you didn't look or act right.

The mess that enters the large gut is a semi-liquid, and the process of compacting it by the absorption of water begins. In other words, the large gut is known as the great compactor. The lining of the large gut is very sensitive to toxins, as well as to certain food items such as lactose, which is the sugar found in milk. For example, if you are lactose sensitive, your gut will begin to growl and cramp, and all I can say is, don't be in a place where there is no toilet or you will be embarrassed.

Another sugar found in beans can also insult the gut and make you run in a different direction. In fact, we had an old saying in the hood: "Beans, beans, when you eat a lot, the more you eat, the more you fart." My mom wasn't particular about that expression.

Another bean rhyme stated, "Beans, beans, the musical fruit, the more you eat, the more you toot." Beans, however, are full of rich fiber and are excellent for a healthy gut. Fiber, insoluble and soluble, does magic in the gut by keeping the walls protected from toxic substances, thereby preventing irritation and the beginning of cancer cells forming.

The large gut works 24/7. You may not even recognize that you have a working gut until you put your ear to the abdomen either literally or with a stethoscope and hear mild gushing sounds. On the other hand, if you are experiencing abdominal pain and hear no sounds of gut function, medical attention is warranted because the gut may be paralyzed from exposure to a leak in the abdominal cavity from the gut itself.

Now, getting down to the nitty-gritty: If certain areas of the wall of the gut become weak, small sacs develop, which are known as diverticula. These sacs often become infected by bacteria, resulting in the condition diverticulitis, which causes cramping of the gut, resulting in loose stools and oftentimes bleeding.

Blood in the stool that is the result of bleeding in the large bowel is usually red. Blood found in

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the stool that originates from the stomach is usually black due to a reaction of the hydrochloric acid and the blood. In medical jargon, black stools are known as tarry stools. In other words, they're as black as tar. Whether the blood in the stool is grossly apparent or microscopic, it can be detected by a simple chemical test. The test should be negative if the bowel is healthy. Blood in the stool should always be evaluated with diagnostic tests to determine its origin.