WHAT IS LEAKY GUT SYNDROME, AND WHO MIGHT HAVE IT?

“Leaky Gut syndrome” is a common name for processes in the intestines which cause *increased intestinal permeability.*  Obviously, leaky gut syndrome is easier to say, so let’s stick with that. More importantly, what types of symptoms may you have if you have a leaky gut? Many digestive symptoms are common, including belching, heartburn, reflux, gas, bloating, cramping, frequent diarrhea *and/or* constipation. However, many people with Leaky Gut may have no intestinal symptoms, but have symptoms in other parts of the body, including headaches, sinus problems, joint pain, fatigue, brain fog, fibromyalgia, and many autoimmune disorders. Leaky Gut may be a component of several diagnoses, including irritable bowel syndrome, asthma, inflammatory bowel disease, migraines, inflammatory arthritis, and neurologic diseases.

MECHANISMS OF LEAKY GUT

So, what is really going on in Leaky Gut syndrome? In very basic terms, the gut is a sieve. It is designed to allow in specific helpful nutrients, and keep other food components out because even very healthy food choices, such as organic vegetables, have parts of the food that was never intended to get into our systems. That is why we have an “elimination system.” Various things can lead to “enlargement” of these holes, or “leakiness”. This is usually due to inflammation or disruption in the microflora of the gut or both. The most common things that cause these changes are antibiotics (especially if taken frequently), other medications such as steroids (ie. prednisone), food sensitivities, antacid or acid blocking medicines, non-steroidal anti-inflammatory medications, surgery, parasites, overgrowth of yeasts and unfriendly bacteria, lack of digestive factors, certain illnesses, stress, and even just the SAD diet (Standard American Diet). Leaky Gut can then become a vicious circle which causes more ill-health, leading to the use of more medications that reinforce it, poor eating habits, etc.

FOOD “ALLERGIES” VS. FOOD SENSITIVITIES

Many people refer to food “allergies” when foods cause various problems in their bodies. From a medical standpoint, an “allergy” is only one of many adverse reactions. This word refers specifically to the typical hives, wheezing, low blood pressure (and anaphylaxis) that is one response of the immune system in certain people. Standard allopathic medical allergy tests, such as pin-prick skin testing and RAST blood testing measure responses to this. Less than 5% of people have these kinds of reactions to foods, and so this kind of testing may show no abnormalities. Many more people are affected by the bigger picture of food *sensitivities*. It can include many different symptoms, including swollen joints, fatigue, stomach pains, and diarrhea. Disorders such as celiac disease, migraines, chronic fatigue, fibromyalgia, arthritis, asthma, skin disorders, recurring infections, diabetes, thyroiditis, skin problems, weight gain, and many other symptoms may be caused or worsened by food sensitivities. Even seasonal “hay fever” may have a food-related component. Because food is made up of very complex molecules, the specific food allergy testing described above often “misses the boat” by testing a part of the food that is not causing the sensitivity reaction. Additional food sensitivities and/or leaky gut problems are among the main reasons people sometimes do not notice improvement with elimination diets, such as gluten-free diets.

WHAT CAN BE DONE TO REMEDY LEAKY GUT SYNDROME?

All of the above imbalances may need to be addressed to eradicate the causes of the Leaky Gut Syndrome, as well as heal the gut inflammation to prevent recurrence. The “5 R Program” addresses these:

1. *Remove*—unfriendly bacteria, yeast, parasites, toxins (from food intolerances and other sources, ie. heavy metals.) Specialized testing may be needed to identify these sources.
2. *Replace*—missing digestive factors, such as digestive enzymes, hydrochloric acid, bile salts, immunoglobulins
3. *Repair*—seal up the holes in the leaky gut to allow proper nutrient absorption and keep toxins out of the blood stream so they can be rapidly eliminated from the gut. The amino acid glutamine, and herbal components such as gamma-oryzanol, deglycerrhizinated licorice, slippery elm bark, etc. are often used as “bricks and mortar” to help seal up the gaps in the barrier function of the intestines.
4. *Reinoculate*—reintroduce friendly micro-organisms, ie. probiotics. Science is now showing us that “generic” probiotics may not be the best choice for certain conditions. We now know that certain specific *strains* of beneficial bacteria can actually be used to treat certain conditions, including increased intestinal permeability.
5. *Rebalance*--lifestyle choices. Sleep, exercise, and stress can all affect the GI tract.

Whole Health Solutions specializes in helping people with conditions associated with Leaky Gut Syndrome. Call us a 919-651-0820 to schedule a consultation to learn how to solve these challenging health conditions.