



📷 Organic permaculture garden, iStock.

Body+Soul Daily

Bring on the mud pies because eating dirt is the most exciting new health trend

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THERE's a new tactic in the bid to have a healthy gut — eating dirt, literally.

The technical term is soil-based organisms (SBOs), and they're an amazing but untapped source of beneficial bacteria, Josh Axe, nutritionist and author of *Eat Dirt*, says.

“SBOs are unique because they're designed to withstand the harsh outdoor environment, which means they can also withstand the harsh environment of the digestive tract,” he says.

SBOs help out plants by breaking down matter and producing vitamins.

Up until recently, SBOs have gotten into our system through our contact with soil — whether that's from living on a farm, messing about in the garden or eating raw, unpeeled fruit and vegetables.



But now scientists have produced synthesised versions of some of the organisms, creating a new type of probiotic in the marketplace.

The research into the health effects of exposure to SBOs from soil is still in its infancy, but “there is increasing evidence that exposure might be beneficial,” says professor Tim Spector, professor of Genetic Epidemiology at King’s College London and author of *The Diet Myth*.

Should you get your soil tested?

Live in an inner-city suburb? Your soil may contain lead and other metal contaminants that have come from older homes, paint or traffic fumes. Those contaminants can be passed onto produce grown in that soil, so it’s a good idea to get it tested before starting a veggie garden, Macquarie University says. They run a free testing service across Australia. More [here](#)

He points to several studies from the last few years that found that kids from farms have much lower rates of asthma and allergies than city children.

In a healthy body, the ratio of bacteria in the gut is about 85 per cent “good” (think *Lactobacillus* and *bifidobacteria*) and neutral bacteria, to 15 per cent “bad” bacteria (*E.coli*, *salmonella*).

It is important to maintain this balance because when bad bacteria become overgrown, it’s not only our digestion that suffers, Axe says.

Inflammation goes up, immunity comes down, and many other physiological functions are impaired.



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Dr Robynne Chutkan, gastroenterologist and author of *The Microbiome Solution*, agrees that our health suffers from this bacterial imbalance, and points the finger squarely at our modern lifestyles.

“We’re eating factory assembled, edible food-like substances instead of food; we overuse antibiotics and acid-suppressing drugs that mess up our gut flora; and we’ve super-sanitised our environment and homes to remove all traces of nature,” she says.

But the commercial SBO probiotic is so new, there’s no conclusive evidence for or against it.

In the meantime, should you start revisiting the “mud pie” days of your youth? Yes, says Spector, but he advises to be selective.

As much as possible, try to avoid exposure to artificial fertilisers and pesticides which can come in foods from non-organic sources.

DO THIS FOR SOME GOOD DIRT

•Eat organic (with the skin on)

Chomping on organic, unpeeled fruit and veg is an easy way to get some good dirt bacteria into your system, Spector says. To support the growth of probiotic bacteria, eat bananas, garlic, asparagus, leeks and onions.



 Visit a farm. Picture: iStock

•Visit a farm

Several studies have found that kids who were raised on a farm (particularly dairy farms or

those with live cattle) have significantly lower asthma and allergy rates than city kids. It is thought that both breathing and ingesting farm dust helps the body out.

●Garden regularly

Getting busy in your garden exposes you to the good bacteria in the soil, which is good for your gut, but gardening in general has been linked to a longer lifespan, lower levels of stress and a more positive outlook. Trowel, please!



📷 Eat organic. Picture: iStock

●Use old-fashioned soap

Health experts have taken aim at antibacterial soaps and gels. The United States Food and Drug Administration recently announced a ban on a range of chemicals, including triclosan, used in the products, saying that there's a link to allergies in children and disruption of

hormone levels. There's also growing evidence that these antibacterial agents become resistant to antibiotics, giving rise to superbugs. Using traditional soap is just as effective as antibacterial types at getting rid of harmful germs, without the potential side effects.