

This  
can't  
go  
on



*by* MONIQUE JHINGON

When inconsistent energy, brain fog, digestive issues or other **NAGGING SYMPTOMS** are impacting your life and you are ready to **take action**, there is **ONE DECISION** you need to make to feel **energized, focused and productive** again.



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# Introduction

**APRIL, 2005**

**I was on my way to a meeting when I received the call. It was 3pm in Singapore and not usually the time that my mom called. For a moment I considered not answering and calling her back after my meeting, but something made me pick up the phone anyway. The moment she started talking I knew, from the sound of her voice, that something was wrong.**

Without wasting time she told me that a few days earlier my father had had a routine colonoscopy during which the doctor had found an abnormal growth. Not wanting to worry me or my brother, they had decided to wait for the biopsy results before talking to us. Earlier that morning my father had received a phone call from his gastroenterologist. The tumor was malignant, requiring emergency surgery to remove the cancer. The operation was scheduled for 3 days later.

My mom tried to sound calm and optimistic, but I could make out she was anxious, as was my father when he came on the phone. When we finished our call, I canceled my meeting, called my husband and asked him to book me a ticket to Istanbul. And then I sat quietly in my car, thoughts and questions whirling around in my head. Cancer. Malignant. My father. How was this even possible? There was nothing wrong with him.

My parents were expats, like us, and had been living in Istanbul for the past 2 years. My father was 59, a senior executive at a large multinational firm, and his most recent expat assignment had been very demanding. The job involved long hours, frequent entertaining, and travel, and a special project he had been working on for the past few months had added a lot of stress. There were deadlines involved and head office politics and he had been taking work home, frequently waking up in the middle of the night to make a note of things he didn't want to forget.

My father had received accolades for his work in all his previous assignments and had been steadily climbing the corporate ladder. He could by any standards be considered successful, both professionally and personally. And he was healthy, or at least he thought he was. Yes, his stress levels were high, his sleep not the best, his weight not ideal, and his digestion suboptimal but nothing too alarming so he had ignored all of it, being too busy to do anything about it.

Yet, despite not having any major symptoms, there he was: 3 days away from an emergency cancer surgery with no guarantee of a successful outcome. As he later told me, the main thought in his mind after he heard the news was: "I am not done. I want to live, spend time with my family, retire in good health, travel the world, go fishing."

I arrived in Istanbul just in time for his surgery. I still vividly remember the fear that I felt, which my father's eyes reflected when he was being wheeled away into the operating theater. The even bigger fear when the surgery, which was supposed to last 3 hours, was still going on after 4. The relief when the doctor came out and told us that the operation had been successful, that there was no sign that the cancer had spread through the intestinal wall. And the ultimate relief when a few months later the doctor declared my father cancer-free. But even though everything turned out well, the experience had changed him.

Sometimes it takes a serious health scare to put certain things in perspective: for my father the biggest realization was that he was mortal and that he had been incredibly lucky. That he wasn't ready to jeopardize his health or his future, that a job is not worth risking your life over. He made his bucket list, started bringing back balance, and looked after his diet. These changes not only helped improve his physical and mental health, they allowed him to perform at peak levels until his retirement. At the time of this writing, he is 75 years of age, amazingly fit, and treats his cancer battle scar as an important reminder of his own mortality and the beauty of living life fully. My mom cooks healthy and delicious food for the both of them. They are active; enjoy hiking, biking, travel, and plenty of time with friends and family; and my father goes fishing twice a week, which he calls his meditation practice.

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I wonder sometimes, as I am sure he does too, what would have happened if he hadn't had the routine colonoscopy. Or if making changes earlier on could have changed the course of events. We will never know. But what I do know is that my father's story is not an unusual one: a serious health scare that results in a complete mindset shift, recognition of your own mortality, and commitment to supporting your health in every way possible. What is sadly also not unusual are the events leading up to this: a successful and demanding job that involves long hours, stress, a lack of time to invest in self care, and over-doing things—over-working, over-drinking, over-eating and even over-exercising to balance things out.

Even without a serious wake-up call, when you lead such a demanding life, there are moments where a voice inside says: "you are putting on weight, you're not sleeping well, your energy is inconsistent, you're drinking too much, you're moody, you know this can't go on!" Despite that inner voice or admonitions from loved ones, if you are in a high-profile career, running a business, or life is hectic, you may choose to ignore that you are not sleeping well, putting on weight, losing steam, and feeling heavy, fatigued, and frazzled. You resist making changes because you are too busy, too afraid of what it will take, or too unsure of where to start, or because you think there's nothing to worry about.

Yet, it can't go on. Sticking your head in the sand and hoping your problems will go away is a fraught strategy for future health and wellbeing.

**If this sounds like you—you are in a demanding job or running a business and nagging symptoms such as inconsistent energy, unexplained weight gain or brain fog are noticeable and have started impacting your life and if deep down you know this can't go on and you're ready to experience relief, this booklet will show you the one decision you need to make to get back to feeling energized, fit, and productive.**

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# Looking for **Answers**

## **1 YEAR LATER ...**

**It was a beautiful, sunny morning in Bali. The sun streamed through the window of our hotel villa, which looked out on tropical green gardens. My husband and I had just come back from breakfast and he was talking about our plans for the day: should we go out to explore Bali, do a spa day or relax by the pool? All I could think of was how exhausted I felt, completely depleted of energy. I put my head down on my pillow and as he continued talking, my eyes became heavy and I drifted into sleep. When I woke up 3 hours later, he was sitting in the garden, sipping his coffee and reading a book, patiently waiting for me to wake up, and at that very moment I realised: this can't go on.**

I had not been feeling well for a while: fatigue was just one of the issues that had been troubling me. My skin was breaking out, my lower back was hurting, I would go from feeling great to feeling low at the drop of a hat and angry for the smallest of reasons, and my digestion was a mess. I would literally break into a sweat with intense abdominal pain a few times a day. I was 37 years old, had a wonderful, successful husband and two amazing little boys, and I had no idea what was wrong with me. This long weekend get-away, made possible by my in-laws, who were babysitting the kids back in Singapore, was for us to spend a few days of undisturbed quality time together and here I was, barely able to make it out of bed in time for breakfast before needing to come back and fall into exhausted sleep again.

In the months leading up to this trip, I had seen different doctors in Singapore: a general practitioner, a dermatologist, a gynecologist, and a gastroenterologist. The latter had performed a colonoscopy, given my

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father's history of colon cancer. Results of the colonoscopy were all clear, and neither the gastroenterologist nor any of the other doctors could give me any explanation for what was going on. The creams, bio-identical hormones and other medicines they prescribed had not helped. I had tried different diets, ranging from vegan to raw food, blood type, and Ayurvedic. I had tried alternative therapies, from Reiki to light therapy and acupuncture. Detox juice cleanses had made me feel ten times worse. I was at my wit's end. My issues were not bad enough to warrant an "official diagnosis" but they were definitely affecting the quality of my life and the people I cared for.

As I looked at my husband, who was patiently waiting for me to get up, I felt worried. What was wrong with me? What if it was something serious? Like cancer? What if it wouldn't get better? Why was no-one able to tell me what was going on? That morning, in beautiful, sunny Bali, was my tipping point. I made a commitment to myself to go back home and do whatever it would take to find answers and regain my health.

As luck would have it, a friend recommended a naturopathic doctor in Singapore shortly after our trip to Bali. This doctor identified one of the main underlying causes of my issues: intestinal hyper permeability, also known as a "leaky gut". When I started following my doctor's recommendations for healing my gut, which involved diet changes and some nutritional supplements, I noticed improvements very quickly.

In hindsight, my experience was instrumental in helping me find my passion. It opened me up to the power of food. It was the start of a long journey that took me deep into the world of holistic health and wellness, nutrition, yoga—everything related to achieving optimal health holistically. I learned how to heal myself and optimize my health and then learned how to help others, using nutrition and lifestyle as a foundation. I became a yoga teacher, a health coach, and studied how to use functional diagnostic testing to uncover the root of health issues. I trained with renowned functional practitioners and got many certifications and ultimately, a Master's degree in Personalised Nutrition.

Many, if not all holistic, functional-minded healthcare practitioners have a story similar to mine. A history of chronic health conditions and frustration with modern medicine's focus on symptom control results in a powerful desire to find a better way. Conventional medicine is a blessing for those with a serious or life-threatening condition, like my father when he found out he had cancer, but often fails to address chronic health issues like the ones I was dealing with.

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Over time, as I slowly felt better, I realized that what I was dealing with resulted from many factors. I had certain genetic mutations that predisposed me to gastrointestinal imbalances and took multiple courses of antibiotics throughout my childhood for bouts of flu, ear, and throat infections. The icing on the cake had happened 11 years earlier, when I moved to India and contracted two severe stomach infections in 1 year. The infections had been bad and I took heavy courses of antibiotics each time, which facilitated my recovery, but left a lasting impact on my gut. By the time I was living in Singapore, I had lingering parasite and bacterial infections, intestinal inflammation, a compromised intestinal barrier, and an inability to break down my food properly and absorb nutrients. No wonder I was feeling the way I did! These discoveries were not only the end of my troubles, as I now knew what to focus on, they were the beginning of my fascination with the gut and its role as a true center of health.

My mentor, Andrea Nakayama, one of the world's leading functional nutritionists and a passionate advocate for reframing health and healthcare, says, "it's all connected, everything matters and we are all unique." In addressing chronic health issues, whether they are mild or severe, there is never one single solution that solves everything or that applies to everyone. However, after a decade of learning about the gut, I firmly believe that this is where a lot of the answers are. It's where I believe you need to start your health journey, whether you are feeling low on energy, unfocused or unproductive, have a chronic illness, are feeling suboptimal in any other way, or simply want to stay on top of your game.

## Meet Your Inner Dream Team

Around the same time that I realised the role of my gut in everything that was going on, science had taken a serious interest in the gut as well. The United States National Institute of Health launched the human gut microbiome research project in 2007 to better understand the role of gut microbiota in human health and disease. Scientists understood that we had a staggering number of microbes in and on our human bodies, but they did not know a lot about the impact of these microbes on our biological functions.

Mind-boggling discoveries ensued and revealed that we are not just human; we are a living and breathing ecosystem or, as some scientists have pointed out, a walking column of microbes. Our bodies host over

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100 trillion microbial cells that directly affect our health and disease. These microorganisms influence our energy levels and hormones, they talk to our brain, regulate our appetite, synthesize nutrients and, when out of balance, contribute to everything from obesity to chronic fatigue and brain fog.

Let me put it this way: in the same way that the success of your company depends on its people, your success depends on the performance of an internal team of workers. Call it your internal dream team. Collectively, the members of this department can make or break your weight, energy, productivity, and focus and ward off more serious health issues. That dream team comprises microorganisms that live in and on your body and that collectively influence up to 95% of your biological functions. They regulate your metabolism, your energy levels, your brain function and mindset—such a highly influential team is surely a vital part of your inner “organization”!

Since the birth of modern medicine, scientists have focused on the impact of our human genes on health and disease. The relatively recent discovery of the microbiome, which is the collective genetic material of our own resident microorganisms, has revealed that this is merely a small part of what influences our health. The way our body functions is predominantly regulated by bugs, and we are quickly learning how to tap into this enormous potential.

This discovery presents a radical and radically powerful way of looking at yourself and everything you are battling: your weight, your energy, your mental state and all the other factors that are essential to success, health, and longevity. You have a core team that is intimately involved in your success. The logical next step is to conduct a detailed assessment of the strengths and weaknesses of this team: their performance, output, productivity, possible workflow issues, bottle necks, leakages, or other logistical issues. The birth of high-end gut microbiome mapping tests, which look at the composition of your gut microbes and the state of your digestive function, can facilitate such an assessment and it was such a test that helped me to identify the root cause of my health issues.

My test results showed that my inner dream team was in a bad state and that the space they were working in had metaphorical holes in the roof and toxins floating around. Because of working in a suboptimal environment, they could not provide my body the support it needed and instead were sabotaging my success. In other words, the dream team that was supposed to be my ally was a mess and had literally become an enemy.

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## All it Takes is a Simple Decision

In your business or your company, once you know the underlying weaknesses, you create a restructuring strategy to address the issues. Such a strategy likely involves supporting key team members and replacing unproductive ones, making the work environment conducive to peak performance and giving your team access to vital resources. Your job is to ensure that your core team is perfectly geared to take your organization to greater heights.

Nothing's stopping you from doing all that with your inner dream team. Once you know the strengths and weaknesses of your gut through a specialized gastrointestinal (GI) and microbiome test, which is now readily available, you can match findings with your health history, your current symptoms, and your vision. You can then create a highly targeted nutrition and lifestyle strategy and implement it to gear up your gut and optimize your dream team and your energy, focus, and productivity.

This is exactly what I did. With targeted nutrition, supplement, and lifestyle changes, I was able to restore my gut microbiome, get rid of the bad players, strengthen my digestion, and resolve my issues. The results were truly amazing. My skin cleared up, my digestion settled down, my sleep became deep and restful, I had plenty of energy, I felt calm and balanced. Not only did I vow to nurture and nourish my inner dream team for the rest of my life, the experience made me understand how everything we experience is connected to the complex ecosystem that makes up our biology. It set me on a path to learning all about how to gear up the gut and how to help my clients resolve their health challenges by first focusing on their most vital health center.

Restoring your inner dream team and creating the right environment for it to thrive is vital to your health and your life. The cost of ignoring this is potentially huge. Not just in terms of how you feel and the possibility of more serious health issues in the future but also because of the ripple effect it can have on your career, your marriage, future health-care costs, or relationships.

If, on the other hand, you make the simple decision to gear up your gut, you are looking at enhanced energy, productivity, brain power, balanced moods, and a more fulfilling life.

To illustrate the power of this decision, let's look at some real-life client cases to see how three common symptoms—feeling unfit, low on energy, and frazzled—can be traced back to your inner dream team and what is possible when you restore balance in this area.

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# Feeling Unfit?

**Feeling unfit shows up in different ways. For some it's the appearance of love handles, for others an unacceptable number staring at them from the weighing scale or even just a sense of heaviness or a belly bloat that just doesn't seem to go away.**

Perhaps you know the reasons you are feeling unfit. You may have let things slip: eating the wrong foods, late night snacking, or drinking too much combined with a lack of exercise. You know from experience that cleaning up your diet, doing a short and targeted detox, upping your exercise, or intermittent fasting may do the trick and get you back to feeling fit. But the frustrating part is that the effects of these measures just don't seem to last. The moment you ease up on your diet, the weight and the belly just bounce right back, even if you are careful most of the time. Or somehow, of late, dieting measures cannot achieve the desired effect entirely. Weight continues to cling on stubbornly, eating causes your stomach to blow up like a balloon and you feel heavy no matter what you do.

Sometimes, there is no explanation for the extra pounds that have showed up in the last few months. Such was the case with Sanjay.

## MEET SANJAY

A common friend who knew about Sanjay's recent health challenges and my work in gut health and related issues introduced us at a dinner party. I had just filled a plate with delicious Indian food from the buffet and sat down next to Sanjay and his wife, and we started talking. I noticed he wasn't eating, and he told me he had to be very careful

**The moment you ease up on your diet, the weight and the belly just bounce right back.**



with food these days. His diet comprised only a handful of home-cooked foods, which is all he could eat without feeling bloated, nauseous, and uncomfortably full afterwards. Eating from a buffet was asking for trouble, and so he avoided it all together.

Sanjay was 46, and he and his family had been living in Manila for about 2 years. They were serial expats, having lived in five different countries for the past 20 years. Sanjay loved being in the Philippines but his current job was a high pressure one, involving long hours and considerable stress. He was no stranger to the demands of a high-profile job and the need to balance stress with a healthy lifestyle and seemed quite health conscious. He told me he was unable to figure out why, in the past 6 months, he had experienced digestive issues, mood issues and, even more concerning to him, rapid weight gain, for no apparent reason.

Sanjay had battled weight gain before. Ten years earlier he radically changed his diet and lifestyle, restricting carbs, exercising daily, and implementing a better work/life balance and lost 24 kilos. Diagnosed with type 1 diabetes as a child, he realized the importance of staying on top of his health and had maintained a healthy lifestyle ever since. Despite prioritizing a healthy diet and exercise, something had triggered these recent series of health challenges that even his doctor wasn't able to explain and Sanjay was desperately looking for answers. He felt uncomfortable in his body all the time, tired, heavy, and low, and it worried him. He could not understand what was really going on in his body, why nothing seemed to work and worried about the impact it had had on his performance. Knowing this had to stop, Sanjay was ready to do whatever it would take to turn his health around. I told him I knew exactly what he needed.

Issues such as nausea, bloating, and constipation are a clear sign of a compromised digestion. Weight gain, on the other hand, is not usually associated with a disturbed gut. Yet, the two are intimately connected. Gut dysbiosis, which is the overgrowth of pathogenic bacteria and the lack of beneficial ones, can affect the integrity of the intestinal barrier and trigger an inflammatory cascade that contributes to metabolic disorders, including obesity, insulin resistance and diabetes, and neuroinflammation. The combined symptoms that Sanjay was dealing with, from digestive complaints, anxiety, sleep issues, and weight gain, all pointed at chronic low-grade inflammation, originating in the gut.

**Sanjay had experienced digestive issues, mood issues and, even more concerning to him, rapid weight gain, for no apparent reason**



Sanjay signed up as a client and we started working on all the factors that help restore a healthy gut microbiome and gut function. We streamlined his diet and removed potential culprits and brought in gut-healing, anti-inflammatory and nutrient-dense foods. I recommended supplements and easy support practices that helped restore digestive secretions such as stomach acid, bile, and enzymes. We incorporated stress management practices that he could easily incorporate into his work schedule. In as little as 2 weeks, he noticed that the bloating and nausea had drastically improved and his insulin requirement had dropped by 6 units. His weight took a little longer to reduce, but he was already feeling lighter and more balanced. By focusing all our attention on gearing up the gut and restoring his inner dream team back to balance, Sanjay could get on top of his health and feel great again. ■

When feeling unfit, bloated, heavy, and lethargic has become a regular feature in your life and is a cause of concern, when loved ones or friends are commenting on your ever-growing stomach, when you have a cupboard full of clothes that don't fit anymore, when you know you don't look as sharp as you used to, when you need to unbutton your pants after meals, when your low-level discomfort starts to affect your confidence, your productivity and potentially your career, and you realise it can't go on, it may be time to change your tactics.

Instead of trying yet another diet, eliminating foods, or further increasing your workout routine, you need to look under the hood.

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## **Your Inner Dream Team and Your Weight**

Your gut microbiome is a complex ecosystem that requires balance to function optimally. When this system is out of balance, we experience a ripple effect on our fitness level, our mental state, and our weight. Our gut microbiota "talk" to our cells and influence hormones involved in hunger patterns, energy intake, body fat accumulation and insulin mechanisms. The overgrowth of less favourable species can contribute to a state of low-grade inflammation and toxicity, which affects our weight.

No study shows the link between our gut microbiota and weight more powerfully than a research study published in the journal Science in 2013 that involved two types of mice: one lean, one obese.



Researchers took a stool sample from both and used it to colonise the guts of germ-free mice (mice raised without gut microbiota). Everything else remained constant. The stool sample from the obese mice resulted in a much greater increase in weight gain and fat tissue than the stool sample from the lean mouse, proving that gut microbiota directly impact weight and body composition.

Disruptions in gut microbiome composition are common. We live in a world and an era that is full of microbiome disrupting factors such as toxins, medication, stress, pollution, poor diets, lack of exposure to beneficial bacteria, or poor sleep. Disruptions begin as early as *in utero* and continue to occur throughout the lifespan.

Fortunately, there are ways to restore the health of our gut microbiome. It involves assessing the disruption and implementing a targeted nutrition, lifestyle, and supplement strategy to restore balance.

This was exactly what Sanjay did and 3 months later his digestion was humming along smoothly, his weight was back to normal and he was back to feeling happy in his body and in love with his life. And, as happens when you are feeling good and confident, he attracted a wonderful and exciting new career opportunity in a different country.

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## MEET PAUL

Feeling unfit does not always mean carrying excess weight. Paul, for example, was only a few pounds above his ideal weight and he looked fit and trim. He was doing everything to maintain that: he ate a healthy diet, went for a run every morning, worked out with a trainer a few times a week, and maintained a good routine of work and sleep. Yes, he enjoyed a glass of wine (or two) every night with dinner to unwind from his hectic day at work and he let go a bit on the weekends, but none of that affected his weight. Neither did it explain why he blew up like a balloon after every single meal, and despite looking trim, he felt heavy. He had done a lot of work to identify which foods were the worse triggers and had stopped eating gluten, dairy, cruciferous vegetables, red meat, chickpeas, and lentils and could only tolerate small portions of nuts. Despite avoiding these foods, the bloating persisted. The one thing that had made a bit of a difference was intermittent fasting. Paul was pretty fed up. Although he looked good on the outside, he was continuously aware of his digestion and conscious of his bloated stomach.

When Paul described his symptoms, it sounded a lot like a case of small intestinal bacterial overgrowth, a condition also known as SIBO. People with SIBO have an overgrowth of bacteria in the wrong part of their digestive tract: the small intestine. Bacteria feed on fibre and in the process release gas and metabolites, which is not a problem as long as it takes place in the correct part of the digestive tract. If it happens too high up, in the small intestines, this can create uncomfortable bloating along with changes in bowel patterns.

I had Paul do a special test to confirm my suspicions and conducted a detailed review of his health history, which revealed several possible contributing factors: frequent use of antibiotics and hypothyroidism, which can slow down gut motility and result in the build-up of bacterial overgrowth.

Once I knew exactly what was going on with Paul's inner dream team, I created a targeted restructuring strategy that involved reducing the bacterial overgrowth with herbal antimicrobials, supporting the growth of beneficial bacteria with diet and probiotic supplements, and bringing back balance. With these targeted supplements and dietary changes, Paul's bloating quickly disappeared. He became more regular in his bowel patterns, started sleeping better and he even lost a few extra pounds, all in a matter of 3 months.

Not only did he feel better in his body, his attention was no longer drawn to his digestion and he could focus on the things that were important to him, like his career and his family. ■

**Once I knew exactly what was going on with Paul's inner dream team, I created a targeted restructuring strategy**



By focusing your attention on what really matters—the most vital department in your inner organization—doing some investigation into the underlying causes, incorporating strategic diet and lifestyle changes that help optimize this key area in your body, you can lose excess weight more easily and move from feeling bloated and heavy to feeling fit and light.

**All it takes is gearing up your gut.**



# 3 Feeling Fatigued?

**Remember the days when you had boundless energy? When you woke up feeling refreshed, you buzzed through your day until your head hit your pillow at night and you fell into a deep, restful sleep?**

Perhaps you still feel this way with the occasional exception. If the exception becomes the rule, your day may look more like this: you have to drag yourself out of bed on most days and load up on caffeine to get you going, or face afternoon slumps when all you can think of is taking a nap. Or when your head hits your pillow at night, you toss and turn for at least another hour before you fall asleep, only to wake up several times a night with thoughts racing around in your head.

Sleep issues and fatigue are at a record high, especially amongst high-powered people who need to be on top of their game throughout the day and cannot afford to slow down. Everyone can go through periods of extra workload, longer hours, or extreme stress that result in temporary lack of sleep or increased levels of fatigue. When the problem persists even after you've prioritized rest and relaxation, you know this can't go on.

Some red flags that point at deeper imbalances are a general inability to fall asleep at night, regular use of sleeping pills, frequent night time wakings or outright insomnia, racing thoughts in the middle of the night, waking up every morning feeling heavy and foggy or feeling worn out all the time.

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## MEET MAHER

Maier had been experiencing sleep issues for a few years now. He told me when we first spoke that he just never entered a state of deep sleep. He felt as if he was in a twilight zone all night, asleep but still remotely aware of what was going on around him. It took him several hours in the morning to clear the fog in his head and be able to even read the newspaper. There were some other health issues he was dealing with, but it was the severe lack of sleep that worried him the most. As a financial analyst he needed his brain to function optimally at all times and if things continued this way, he wasn't sure how he would excel at his job.

Maier had been to see a sleep specialist who had diagnosed him with a stress-related sleep disorder and prescribed him a tricyclic antidepressant for a few months, which had made it a bit easier to fall asleep but after the treatment was over, he was back to where he was before.

I sat down with Maier to get a complete picture of his health history. He had battled lifelong acne and taken several rounds of treatment for this. He had had a bacterial infection in his stomach and had frequently used antibiotics and acid-blocking medication. Besides supporting his diet, lifestyle, and sleep habits, we needed to investigate what was going on in his gut.

The inner dream team is not usually a place that people look to for answers for issues related to energy and sleep. Even before I go there, I ensure that my clients are eating a nutrient-dense diet, practicing good sleep habits, and are taking care of all the foundations that support health and consistent energy. Maier had several factors in his past that suggested deeper underlying imbalances in his digestive function and gut microbiome, and so I asked him to do a functional gut test.

While waiting for the results, we started working on the foundation: eating a nutrient-dense diet, which supported all the cofactors for key hormones and neurotransmitters involved in sleep. I recommended some herbal sleep-support supplements and had Maier implement key changes in his daily routine that help support a better circadian rhythm. While all of this helped to some extent, it didn't get the results I was looking for. When Maier's test report came back, one of the main reasons for his sleep issues was obvious: Maier had some unwanted members in his core team that were sabotaging his gut health,

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impairing digestive function, and creating a chronic inflammatory environment and an increased toxic load that had resulted in the lack of key hormones such as serotonin and melatonin. No wonder Maher was not sleeping properly and felt the way he did. ■

## Your Inner Dream Team and Energy

Everyone has a weak link. It is the symptom that first shows up when things are out of balance. Some people get throat infections, others digestive problems, sleep issues, or skin breakouts. We are all so unique. Our inner ecosystem is equally unique, much like our fingerprint. While we are far from knowing all there is to know about what goes on with our resident microbiota, science has identified certain baseline patterns in our gut microbiome composition that distinguish a healthy internal ecosystem from one that is not. We are also at the point that we can identify problematic species and connect their presence to our unique symptoms.

Some pathogenic species use clever ways to ensure their survival and dominance in the gut. They can detect if the host (i.e., you) is compromised by sensing stress hormones and a compromised immunity and they use this as an opportunity to increase their activity and take over. Once they have taken a foothold in the microbial ecosystem, they become hard to control. Resistant to conventional treatments such as antibiotics, they need some targeted measures to bring levels back to normal.

In Maher's case, we used botanical supplements to weed out the pathogens and strategic nutrition and lifestyle changes to support the growth of key players. Most importantly, Maher made some key changes to his life, such as appropriate daily exercise, a daily meditation practice and a relaxing post-dinner walk with his wife. These changes were able to help support balance within his body and his inner dream team.

When your gut is in a good place, your digestion works optimally and your microbiome is healthy and diverse you feel the impact on everything. You sleep more soundly; you feel good when you get up in the morning and your energy levels are consistent. You can get your work done and have time and energy to spend with your family when you get home. On weekends you are active and able to engage in hobbies and physical activities.

All it takes is gearing up your gut.

**When your gut is in a good place, your digestion works optimally and your microbiome is healthy and diverse you feel the impact on everything**





# 4 Feeling Frazzled?

**Feeling frazzled from time to time is a part of being on this rollercoaster called life. If you want to feel calm at all times, undisturbed by everything around you, you might as well go sit in a cave and disassociate yourself from the world. The very nature of life is unpredictable and messy, often stressful and sometimes outright traumatic. Just when you think everything is going smoothly, something will pop up that has you scrambling.**

World affairs, politics, relationships, deadlines, financial problems, crisis management, pandemics—these are all part of a normal person's life. And when you are at the helm of a company or running your own business, stressful events often occur more frequently. Navigating these choppy waters requires skill and a clear, calm, and focused mind.

You know you are in trouble when your mind is no longer calm and you lose your cool at people around you, when your anger outbursts are out of proportion to the thing that triggered them. You know this can't go on when you say things you know you shouldn't but it's just flying out of you or when you apologise to your loved ones for taking off on them a bit too often.

Besides mood swings and anger outbursts, feeling frazzled can show up in other ways too. It can be more subdued, like low-grade depression, anxiety, a sense of wanting to disassociate from everything, give up and hide. A deep-rooted dissatisfaction with life, a loss of purpose and passion.

When such feelings become the norm, and you can't seem to shake them, when they are affecting your relationships at home or at work or both, your own happiness and your drive, you know this can't go on.

**You know you are in trouble when your mind is no longer calm and you lose your cool at people around you**





## Your Inner Dream Team and Your Brain

There is rarely a single solution to resolving a problem. But I would like to present an angle that you may have not considered before: that the gut microbiome is directly involved in how you feel and act.

Everything in the body is connected. And everything matters. What you eat, how you live, your stress, sleep, exercise, and your relationships are all vital components of supporting health and mental equilibrium.

On a biochemical level, the complicated interplay of neurotransmitters and hormones influences your mental equilibrium and how you feel. Our inner dream team and the place they live in are factors that can cause disturbances in our emotional state of being by directly affecting our brain chemistry.

The connection between our nervous system and our gut can be quite obvious, especially when we experience powerful emotions such as anger or nervousness—think of the knot in your stomach, a feeling of butterflies, cramps or even diarrhoea because of anxiety.

We experience these reactions because of the Enteric Nervous System (ENS), also known as our second brain, which is housed in our gut. It is found in the tissues lining the entire digestive tract; it has more neurons than our spinal cord and it makes more neurotransmitters than our brain. For example, ninety percent of serotonin is produced in our digestive system to help regulate sensory, motor and secretory functions in the gastrointestinal tract. Serotonin also regulates our mood, and low levels are involved in mood disorders such as anxiety, depression, and compromised sleep.

This second brain and the brain we have in our skull are in constant communication. When our thoughts or behavior change, the gut picks up on this and similarly, when we have gut inflammation because of a compromised intestinal barrier or changes in our resident gut microbiota community, we can experience behavioral changes. Certain potentially pathogenic members of our inner dream team, when overgrown, generate toxins that can enter our bloodstream and travel up to our brain where they cause neuroinflammation.

Depression, fatigue, anxiety, mood swings, and brain fog are some pretty common symptoms linked to digestive imbalances.

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## MEET DIANE

Diane started working with me because of digestive issues that no doctor had been able to help her resolve. About 10 years earlier, she had gone through a series of check-ups and because the results were normal, the doctor sent her home with an irritable bowel syndrome (IBS) diagnosis and a suggestion that most of it was in her head. Her symptoms had started while she was seriously bullied at work so she could relate to it being connected with mental and emotional stress. What she couldn't understand was that she was happy now, in her job and her relationship, yet her symptoms were still there and continued to influence not only her work but also her ability to enjoy a normal social life.

Diane's tipping point: when she and her partner decided to get pregnant and she knew she needed to be in the best physical and mental health possible. Of late, Diane had been dealing with extreme mood swings. She had noticed feeling anxious often and being easily triggered into anger outbursts that were totally out of proportion to the situation. Acutely aware that this had started affecting her relationship with her partner, she also knew she didn't want to be that kind of mother. Her relationship, her career, and her desire to be a mom were all important to her, and she knew she needed to do whatever it would take to reclaim and sustain her inner balance.

We focused on total gut restoration, removing foods that were causing inflammation and bringing in foods and supplements that helped heal the gut barrier, reduce intestinal inflammation, and restore microbial balance. Six weeks later, Diane's digestion was normal, bloating and abdominal pain had disappeared, and she was feeling more balanced. Even her partner had noticed she was calmer and more fun to be around. We worked together for 3 months to create a solid foundation for sustaining this renewed physical and mental health, and a few months after that Diane emailed to tell me that she was pregnant and over the moon. ■

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Spending some time to support your second brain and its residents is a powerful way to stop feeling frazzled and out of control of your emotions.

The resulting sense of calm and balance will help you to navigate the unavoidable stresses at work with confidence and ease and strengthen your relationships at home.

**All it takes is gearing up your gut.**



# Taking Action

**The stories I have shared are just a sample of the powerful shifts that happened when I, my clients, and countless other people around the globe made the decision to investigate their core center of health and started to address imbalances in a targeted manner.**

A gut rebuilding strategy needs to happen within a larger context of nutrition and lifestyle changes, not only because everything matters, but also because there is a dynamic interplay between the food we eat, the stressors we are exposed to, movement and exercise, other lifestyle factors, and the health of our microbial friends. Given the importance of the microbiome in optimizing our own performance, I believe that the gut is where it all begins and that is where we need to focus our attention first, while layering in all the other aspects that influence our health.

If you are currently feeling suboptimal in any way—tired, sleep-deprived, stressed, heavy, or foggy—or if you are dealing with more severe chronic health issues, you are likely experiencing warning signals that point at deeper underlying imbalances that may be connected to disturbances in your most critical inner department. I would like to urge you to not act like most people: don't ignore the warning signals or accept these changes as an inevitable part of ageing or a busy lifestyle. Don't patch up your issues with medication that merely takes away your symptoms, and don't just hope for the best. You are at a critical juncture. Ignoring these signals or patching things up may send you down a slippery slope to

**A gut rebuilding strategy needs to happen within a larger context of nutrition and lifestyle changes**



diminishing performance or full-blown disease. And even if you're prepared to live with that risk, life in the suboptimal zone isn't much fun. Wouldn't you like to know what your microbial team is up to?

Finding out the state of your inner dream team is surprisingly simple: a high quality GI test can give you a lot of information. Granted, there is still a lot to be uncovered about our microbiome and new research studies are continuously being published in this area. But we do have some insight into what a healthy microbiome should look like, what the key players are and the levels at which they should ideally be represented, which microbes we absolutely don't want to see, and which become problematic when overgrown or underrepresented. Often there are clear correlations between the presence or absence of certain species and the symptoms a person is dealing with. We can also see from these tests how well our microbes are breaking down our food, whether there is inflammation or toxicity, and if our first line of immune defense in the gut is working properly.

And if things are out of order, there are easy and impactful ways to rebalance our gut microbiome and improve our digestive function. Nutrition strategies can create a powerful shift, boosting beneficial team members; supplements can give us targeted measures to heal and take care of the bad guys; and lifestyle changes can help to cement it all together.

As shown in the different client cases, everyone is unique and so is their current gut and microbiome status. This means that intervention strategies have to be personalized. And this is why I have avoided providing one-size-fits-all solutions. My aim for writing this booklet is to help generate awareness and create a mindset shift so that more people recognise the importance of their inner ecosystem and decide to take charge of getting it into shape.

I hope you will decide to step away from the norm after reading this and take the profoundly impactful decision to become a gut whisperer, to stay on top of your game and turn your inner dream team into your most important ally in the pursuit of a thriving, vibrant, resilient body that helps you achieve your goals, whether it is looking and feeling sharp, furthering your career or business, living a fulfilling personal life or having the energy to cross off all the items on your bucket list post-retirement.

**Go gear up that gut!**

*Monique*

**Nutrition strategies can create a powerful shift, supplements can give us targeted measures to heal and lifestyle changes can help to cement it all together.**





MONIQUE JHINGON

## About Monique

Monique is an experienced functional nutritionist who specializes in digestive health and related conditions, microbiome restoration and health optimization for top executives, entrepreneurs and other high performing people across the globe. She also writes articles on diverse health topics and runs educational workshops.

Monique's journey into the world of functional nutrition started 15 years ago when she was battling chronic health challenges that had her feeling fatigued, moody, unfit and in pain. The experience was instrumental in helping her understand the power of food and the role of the gut as our core center of health and key to enhanced energy, productivity and focus.

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