

# G.A.P.S.<sup>TM</sup>

## Quick Guide for Vegetarians

A Health Reflections Special

### Part 1

*This resource aims to facilitate the possibility of G.A.P.S.<sup>TM</sup> for those who do not wish to consume animal flesh. It is not a one-size-fits-all solution, but encourages balance and flexibility in our co-developing approach to nutrition.*

Food can be an emotive subject. Clearly it acts as physical fuel, but it also symbolises multiple levels of our care for one another, for plant life, for animals and for the soil.

As both a homeopath and G.A.P.S. practitioner, I work with a diverse spectrum of individuals, ranging from -

- ♥ children whose damaged digestive systems cannot tolerate any plant food whatsoever, to
- ♥ severely ill individuals, such as those undergoing chemotherapy, who choose to cleanse their bodies with a temporary measure of plant foods only, to
- ♥ holistically minded farmers who apply the principles of H.A.W.L. (*Homeopathy at Wellie Level*) to promote the highest possible levels of welfare for livestock and the lowest possible levels of toxins in milk / eggs / meat / crops.

When people turn to G.A.P.S. they are usually in a state of such ill health that they are forced to face up to a lost microbial diversity in the gut, in the brain, on the skin and even beyond the body. Subsequently, in relearning about the food and skills needed to redress that lively balance, we can find ourselves valuing all food afresh, with newfound gratitude and deep insights into our relationship with the *whole* live picture, from sun to soil.

**What is G.A.P.S.?** The acronym stands for both *Gut and Psychology Syndrome* and *Gut and Physiology Syndrome* and is a term coined by Dr Natasha Campbell-McBride. In her books on the subject, she describes a whole spectrum of interconnected health challenges.

For anyone whose *state of mind* is troubling them – from anxiety or depression to brain fog or learning difficulties – it can be enlightening to know how closely related this is to the health of the digestive system. Naturally, it follows that what we choose to eat on a daily basis will be contributing in one way or another to the gut-brain axis.

Similarly, the *physical body* functions in close network with the gut. Again, our dietary choices can either hinder or help physiology, including fertility, the regulation of blood sugar, the condition of skin and nerves, our ability to withstand infections of all sorts, and the ease with which we're able to use our joints and lungs and special senses.



The great advantage of a gut-focused approach to healing is that digestive health is within most people's capacity to influence. G.A.P.S. is not about a sole reliance on medical specialists or expensive drugs. It's about educating *ourselves* about what we choose to eat day-in-day-out, and about feeling *empowered* to choose well.

### ★★ FURTHER READING ★★

*Gut and Psychology Syndrome – Revised and Enlarged Edition:* Dr Natasha Campbell-McBride (Medinform, 2018);

*Gut and Physiology Syndrome:* Dr Natasha Campbell-McBride (Medinform, 2020);

*This is Farm Homeopathy PDF:* HAWL ([www.HAWL.co.uk](http://www.HAWL.co.uk));

*Nourishing Fats – Why We Need Animal Fats for Health and Happiness:* Sally Fallon Morell (Grand Central Life & Style, 2017);

*The Heal Your Gut Cookbook:* Hilary Boynton & Mary Bracket (Chelsea Green, 2014).

**The Gut Wall:** Inside the body is a sausage-like structure: the gut. One section of this tubing – the small intestine – is a particularly interesting place. In health, its walls provide a home for a whole range of microbes which, amongst other things help to a) digest and absorb food, b) ensure that we produce a healthy range of hormones and c) protect us from any harmful invading species.

Unfortunately we don't always look after our protective gut microbes, with damaging factors including emotional stressors, a whole range of medicines (e.g. antibiotics and painkillers) and pesticide residues on fruit and cereal crops. Such influences can sweep out beneficial bacteria and open the walls to vulnerability, allowing pathogenic microbes to move in.

As well as predisposing us to digestive disturbances, a challenged gut environment may be mirrored in other symptoms such as weak immunity, unhealthy skin, diabetes and other hormonal problems, all manner of allergies and mental unrest. Whatever was previously contained within the digestive system may now be leaking through a perforated barrier and into the rest of the body. Fortunately, we can work to improve this situation through informed food choices and a dedication to healing and sealing the damaged gut wall. And **fats** - believe it or not - play a crucial part.

**“Healing and Sealing” the Gut Wall:** The G.A.P.S. approach to addressing all manner of symptoms is to 'heal and seal' the leaky gut first and foremost. Homemade stocks and natural fats provide the building blocks for this much needed repair work, paving the way for the later introduction of probiotics. But if meat or fish stocks are off your menu, then consuming plentiful amounts of vegetarian-friendly fats will form part of your daily priorities. These *must* be natural varieties, never *ever* industrially processed (so absolutely no vegetable oils or margarines or soya spreads – none whatsoever! Yes you heard it, *no* artificially produced fats).

**Traditional Fats:** In adopting a G.A.P.S. style of eating, these become our new best friends. Nourishing, satiating and super tasty, they include organic butter, ghee and coconut oil for sautéing, coconut cream for smoothies and for swirling into soups, olive oil for generous drizzling over vegetables and for transforming into homemade tapenade. Eggs, of the freshest and highest quality available can be lightly fried, scrambled, poached, transformed into mayonnaise or hollandaise, or the yolks simply beaten into a Russian Custard. Sustainably sourced avocados lend a fresh taste whilst raw cheeses, if and when tolerated, can provide both nourishing fats and probiotic qualities.

Many bodies have a low tolerance for fats, especially at the beginning of G.A.P.S. But we can work on improving this, with an individualised approach such as homeopathy to help increase our ability to assimilate the nourishment that traditional foods offer.



Free-range Eggs



Coconut Oil / Coconut Cream



Organic Butter / Ghee



Cold-pressed Olive Oil



Raw Cheese



Avocado & Raw Yogurt Smoothie

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**AUDE SAPERE – MENTRA WYBOD – DARE TO GET IT**

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### Part 2

#### Taking Stock (or not!)

For a vegetarian contemplating G.A.P.S.<sup>TM</sup> the subject of stock may seem like the single most difficult obstacle.

Time and again, G.A.P.S.<sup>TM</sup> practitioners witness how effective meat stock or fish stock consumption is in accelerating a GAPster's progress. In fact, the initial 'Intro' phase of the diet depends largely on meat / fish stock for its collagen and amino acids, which provide remarkable building blocks for healing and sealing the gut wall. For many, it provides the healing journey with a tremendous head-start before progressing to 'Full GAPS' and ultimately, better health.

However, it is not a practitioner's place to govern any moral or cultural grounds that may be informing any individual's choices, and vegetarians may choose to skip the 'Intro' phase despite its benefits, and enter into the 'Full GAPS' way of eating straight away.

On the other hand, some people avoid eating flesh simply because they don't enjoy the taste or texture. If this is the case, it may be perfectly plausible to use a homemade organic chicken stock, for example, as a nutrient-dense base for vegetable soups e.g. carrot and ginger or pea and mint or a nice borscht (potato free) with a dollop of home soured cream. Pescatarians can similarly adopt fish stock as a healing base for chowders, for fish pies topped with mashed cauliflower, and for other fish dishes. Directions for stock-making can be found in Dr Natasha's books.

**How Long Does it Take For The Gut to Heal?** The answer to this is individual. For those embarking on a version of G.A.P.S. that includes meat or fish stocks, eggs,

fish flesh and other nutrient dense animal products, mending is often achieved within a 2 year span, on average. If you choose to skip the stock but follow the remaining guidelines for increased fats and omission of all processed foods, soy and grains, you will still be contributing towards improving gut health but can expect to spend an average of 4 years accomplishing the task. And unfortunately, a small number of people will have to learn to manage their condition long-term; this may be the case when extensive microbiome damage has occurred over several generations.

**Nourishing and Cleansing.** In *Vegetarianism Explained*, Dr Natasha Campbell-McBride offers a clear explanation of the nourishing nature of animal-based food and the cleansing nature of plant matter. 'Nourishing' in this context refers to the building blocks imparted from animal-based products (as well as from some rare exceptions from the plant kingdom, such as coconut oil and avocados.) These provide raw material for growth and cell regeneration, and are especially important for children and pregnant women. 'Cleansing' refers to the taxi action of plant-based foods as they carry out toxicity (as do a limited number of animal foods like egg whites and bare bone broths.) In health, a combination of the two actions is desirable; cleansing alone will lead to trouble long term.

**Sunshine.** In addition to plant food, Dr Natasha names sun exposure as a source of cleansing. One of the unexpected effects of following the G.A.P.S. nutritional philosophy is often a newfound ability to tan rather than burn in warm weather, due to the increased consumption of traditional unadulterated fats and consequential decrease in inflammation. Alongside this increased ability to tolerate sunshine (in sensible bursts) comes a boost in exposure to beneficial microbes in the great outdoors and a wider opportunity for 'Vitamin N' – nature itself.

#### ★★ FURTHER READING ★★

*Vegetarianism Explained – Making an Informed Decision:* Dr Natasha Campbell-McBride (Medinform, 2017);

*Feeding Versus Cleansing:* Dr Natasha Campbell-McBride ([www.doctor-natasha.com](http://www.doctor-natasha.com), 2014);

*Fermented Vegetables:* Kristen Shockey (Storey Publishing, 2014);

*Full Length Interview with Lierre Keith:* Nutrition Media ([www.sacredcow.com](http://www.sacredcow.com), 2019);

*Vitamin N:* Richard Louv (Algonquin Books, 2016).

**Biodiversity:** Examine any healthy hedgerow and you're likely to find a mixture of grasses, flowers, fungi, microbes, insects, nests, saplings and established trees, all supporting each other in symbiosis. Healthy conversations are also colourful, respectful and inclusive of all manner of viewpoints and ages! By contrast, a monocrop such as a field of grain, or a large shed crammed with a single animal species, tends to invite disease.

On introducing friendly microbes into the gut, it may help to keep that hedgerow in mind. The aim for most people on G.A.P.S. is to be able to eventually enjoy a *wide variety* of probiotic foods. From sauerkraut to kimchi, from kefir to kvass, these ancient foods have gained a recent resurgence in popularity but it's important to ensure that the gut wall is being tended to effectively with friendly fats *before* introducing beneficial bacteria. It's also advisable not to introduce them too fast, too soon. In her chapter on "Inviting Better Tenants," practitioner Amy Mihaly explains that -

**"When healing G.A.P.S., most people need to do a major eviction and resettlement of the current residents of the body... If you want to keep good tenants, you have to have working appliances and strong walls! Making these changes will begin to put pressure on pathogenic and opportunistic bacteria to either clean up their act or get out."**

Bacteria are ever adapting (a positive aspect of health) with some behaving transiently, some settling and staying in the gut, others putting up a fight and provoking uncomfortable symptoms of 'die-off' in those starting to heal. In the early weeks of changing the gut environment you may well appreciate some nontoxic remedies to soothe such discomforts: the support of a qualified homeopath or acupuncturist or herbalist can be invaluable in such instances.

In the first months, it may also be a good idea to introduce probiotic supplements, slowly increasing from a small dose to a therapeutic level alongside a growing range of fermented foods.

**What Else?** So far we've established that for GAPSters, the dietary mainstays of initial gut healing work are -

- nourishing fats and (for flexitarians) stocks aimed at repairing the leaky gut wall;
- the slow introduction of a variety of probiotic foods, as well as initial supplementation at a therapeutic level.

We also need to mindfully source our vegetables and herbs (for those who can tolerate them) to balance the actions of feeding and cleansing as well as provide pre-biotics. These feed the good, probiotic bacteria in the gut. Organic or homegrown vegetables are best, to avoid eating pesticide residue (bad news for gut flora).

In time and with significant improvements in health, some more fibrous foods such as flaxseed can be introduced, with a view to increasing post-biotic activity and restoring symbiotic relationships.



Sauerkraut



Milk Kefir



Beet Kvass



Jun Tea



Raw Cheese



Fermented Carrots

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## Part 3

There are some foods that a GAPster avoids during the healing process. Heavily processed foods are obviously out, and these include breakfast cereals, commercial plant-based 'milks,' soya proteins, sodas, shop-bought fruit juice and ready made boullion cubes or powders.

**Grains** All grains are avoided whilst healing GAPS conditions. This is not to say that grains are universally 'bad' – no, they are culturally and nutritionally valuable. But a healing gut requires rest from a relentless intake of gluten, and from the feeding of gut pathogens with undigested starch. Several years later, when your enterocytes have regained an ability to produce digestive enzymes, the 3<sup>rd</sup> and final stage of GAPS will be to reintroduce fermented oats, buckwheat, rice etc. At this point you will be mindful to source them from organic land with no pesticides employed, especially at the point of harvest.

**Sugar** White sugar, brown sugar, icing sugar, syrup – they're all most definitely out of a GAPster's life. (Arguably they should be out of everybody's regular diet due to their inflammatory nature.) We do need sweetness in our life though, and a little honey is often acceptable for those who tolerate it, and later on some seasonal fruit may be incorporated into smoothies and puddings. Just make sure to pair up any sweetness with a dollop of ghee or coconut oil or raw cream, to slow down any elevation in blood glucose.

**Starchy Carbohydrates** Like grains and sucrose, some vegetables fall into a category that is difficult for a sick gut to break down. For this reason, potatoes and sweet potatoes will need to be cut out for a while and replaced with less starchy options such as cauliflower and celeriac.

**Lactose** Most dairy products these days are heavily processed and some people find themselves allergic to them. However, when milk is fermented, a large percentage of troublesome proteins get predigested. As the gut shows signs of healing, many patients find that they are able to introduce good quality dairy, unhomogenised and fermented, without any of their previous ill effects. Home-fermented kefir and yogurt is preferable to shop-bought. If you can find a local farmer who sells milk from a happy goat or contented cow with calf-at-foot, all the better.

**Weaning** For G.A.P.S. families with a baby, the steps to weaning are similar to the steps of the *Intro Diet*, with a different time-scale. This nutrient-rich start to life is similar to traditional weaning practices worldwide, and is wiser and easier to implement than trying to reverse a child's taste and any detrimental eating habits at a later stage.

A simple guide can be found at [www.honestbody.com](http://www.honestbody.com), where G.A.P.S. practitioner Melanie Fielstra says how she wishes that she'd known, when weaning her own children, how not to mess up their digestive systems with dead commercial "baby" food but to concentrate instead on brain-building foods like fats and egg yolks.

For a full list of foods to enjoy and foods to avoid, read Dr Natasha's *Gut and Psychology Syndrome* and *The Heal Your Gut Cookbook* by Boynton and Brackett. These are not vegetarian cookbooks, but provide a useful stage by stage guide to G.A.P.S., with many recipes that can be adapted.

**Asking others for support** G.A.P.S. is hardly a walk in the park, so get some help from a practitioner or from family and friends. Take time for Epsom salt baths, for sun exposure and for walks in nature. Get together with lighthearted people to make sauerkraut, stocks and non-toxic cosmetics. Maintain a sense of humour and go well.

### ★★ FURTHER READING ★★

*How to Introduce Solids to Baby the GAPS Way:* Melanie Fielstra ([www.honestbody.com](http://www.honestbody.com), 2020);

*Staying Alive in Toxic Times:* Dr Jenny Goodman (Yellow Kite, 2021);

*Interview with Dr Natasha Campbell-McBride:* Deborah Morgan ([www.kidshealthrevolution.com](http://www.kidshealthrevolution.com) / [app.apple.com](http://app.apple.com) 2017);

*Can I Do The GAPS Diet While I'm Pregnant?:* Jennifer Scribner ([www.bodywisdomnutrition.com](http://www.bodywisdomnutrition.com), 2021);

*The Nourishing Traditions Book of Baby & Child Care:* Sally Fallon Morell & Thomas Cowan (New Trends, 2013).

"Among my patients with ME / Chronic Fatigue Syndrome, 80-90% are either vegan, or they are second generation vegetarian, by which I mean a life-long vegetarian born to a mother who was also vegetarian all her adult life.

I work with them to improve their gut function, maximising the potential of their small intestine to extract the vital nutrients out of their plant food. It helps. But those who make the most clinical improvement are those who decide to introduce into their diet, now and then, a little bit of sustainably caught fish, or a little bit of free-range, humanely reared, organic poultry. As soup if necessary, if they feel they just cannot chew flesh.

It has to be said, the vegans' fierce critique of cruel factory-farming methods is correct; but we don't need to eat that kind of meat...

Even though your soul may be vegan, your body may be a carnivore. At least occasionally. We evolved as omnivores, eating a little bit of everything, but not an overdose of anything."

Dr Jenny Goodman  
*Staying Alive in Toxic Times*  
Yellow Kite, 2020

## Russian Custard



*This requires an electric whisk or stand mixer. Don't even try using a hand whisk – that just won't work!*

Take 2-3 super fresh egg yolks per person. Ensure that they are from perfectly healthy hens that are allowed to forage. The egg whites won't be needed this time.

Add a pinch of vanilla powder and a teaspoonful of honey to the egg yolks, then whisk until pale and thick like mousse. This may take 10 minutes or more. Spoon into a pudding bowl and serve alone or with berries.









To benefit from the nutrient density of raw egg yolks, this custard does not require cooking. It is easily absorbed by the gut, with no major digestive effort required. The combination of fat with honey can also help regulate fluctuations in blood sugar.

## Fish Pate



*For pescatarians! Get talking to your local fishmonger / fishing enthusiasts and source sustainably caught wild fish. Ask for the carcasses too, for making stock.*

### Ingredients:

-  2 wild salmon fillets, sautéed with one chopped onion in half a cupful of ghee;
-  Half a cup of coconut cream;
-  2 garlic cloves, peeled;
-  1 teaspoonsful each of sweet paprika and mustard powder;
-  Juice of one small lemon;
-  Salt and pepper to taste.







**Method:** Place all ingredients in a blender and combine to a smooth consistency. Transfer into glass jars, top with parsley leaves and serve with raw carrot slices.

## Green Pea and Mint Soup



*If venturing into the new territory of chicken stock, you may wish to practise deep gratitude whilst supporting smaller scale, regenerative farms with a spiritual ethos.*

### Ingredients:

-  1 pint fresh homemade vegetable stock OR (for flexitarians) 1 pint fresh homemade chicken stock (to significantly speed up healing of the gut wall);
-  1 cupful of cubed celeriac and 1 leek, sliced;
-  2 turnips and 2 onions, peeled and chopped;
-  3-4 cupsful of green peas;
-  Handful of fresh mint leaves;
-  A generous measure of gratitude.

**Method:** Place all ingredients, except for the mint, in a pan and simmer until all the vegetables have softened.

Add the mint leaves and blend to a smooth consistency with a hand blender or food processor. Season to taste.

Serve topped with a swirl of kefir and spoonful of sauerkraut, for added friendly fat and probiotics.

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