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## At home stool test for bacteria

Stool samples can help doctors diagnose some health conditions. Tips for collecting a stool sample include urinating before collecting the sample and using any tools that the sample kit provides.Stool is the material in a person’s bowel movement. People may also refer to stool as feces or poop. Healthcare professionals in a laboratory analyze stool samples to detect certain substances that may indicate someone has a health condition.People usually collect stool samples at home using a kit. They then store and return the samples to a healthcare facility, where scientists analyze them. Depending on the results, healthcare professionals can make a treatment plan or request further diagnostic tests.This article explores what to do before collecting a stool sample, how to collect and store stool samples, and how to return them. It also discusses why doctors use stool samples.Share on PinterestKarl Tapales/Getty ImagesEach test has detailed instructions for use. However, healthcare professionals can also answer any questions someone has about collecting a stool sample.Some foods or medications may affect the results of some types of sample tests. Different types of tests may also have different instructions for collecting the sample.Stool sample kits typically include a sample tube, instructions, and a collection spoon or spatula. They may include a canister or resealable bag to put the tube in after collecting a sample. Some may provide gloves for a person to wear during collection.Different stool sample kits may provide different collection instructions. A person always needs to follow the instructions with their kit. However, some common steps to collect a stool sample include:Labeling the sample tube: A person may need to label the collection tube with the date, their name, and personal details. This may include their date of birth and address.Washing hands thoroughly: A person needs to wash their hands before they collect the stool sample.Urinating before collecting the sample: This is to avoid contaminating the sample.Placing a collection object in the toilet: This is to catch the stool, and the object may be an empty plastic container. It may also be clean, plastic wrap, secured around the brim of the toilet with tape.Passing stool over the container or wrap: People should not urinate at the same time.Using the spoon or spatula provided with the test kit: People need these to put the required amount of stool into the tube. This may be a piece of stool no bigger than a dime. They should then close, seal, or screw the lid of the tube tight.Placing the tube in the provided bag or canister: A person needs to ensure they seal the bag or canister.Safely disposing of any remaining stool: People can then flush any remaining stool into the toilet. They also need to safely dispose of anything they used to collect the sample.Washing hands thoroughly again: A person needs to wash their hands after collecting the sample and dispose of any equipment they used to collect the sample.People may be able to mail some types of stool samples to the required healthcare facility. However, they may need to do so within certain time limits or mail the sample in refrigerated containers.If a person stores the sample over a longer period, the bacteria in the stool may multiply. This can affect the accuracy of the results.People may need to return some samples within 24 hours, but they should check this with a healthcare professional when they receive the sample kit. They may be able to return a sample to a designated healthcare professional in person.A person may need to store a sample before returning it. However, stool sample kits may have different storage instructions. People need to keep some types of stool samples cool, using a refrigerator or cool pack. Storing samples at higher temperatures may cause the bacteria in them to multiply, which can affect the accuracy of the test results. People should always ensure they follow the storage instructions within the sample kit.Healthcare professionals typically provide stool sample kits for people to collect samples at home. Different types of tests may have different instructions, and most feature a sample tube and collection device. People can follow the instructions to put a sample in the tube using the collection device. Stool sample kits may also have different storage and return instructions. Stool samples can help healthcare professionals diagnose certain conditions. They may also help doctors screen for colorectal cancer before someone has symptoms. A person needs to speak with their doctor if they have questions about using a stool sample kit.GastroIntestinal / Gastroenterology Published: May 2, 2024 | Updated: August 15, 2024 Read Time: 6 minutes Our product recommendations are selected by editors, tested first-hand, or expert-approved. We may earn a commission through links on our site. If you’ve been dealing with mysterious, chronic digestive symptoms—like bloating, diarrhea, or constipation—you probably have an arsenal of probiotics and fiber supplements and a pantry full of gut health-supporting foods. But what if your symptoms persist, even when you keep a tight protocol? Enter at-home gut health tests, which some companies are now claiming to uncover the root cause of your discomfort. But do these gut health tests really work? A registered dietitian and a gastroenterologist dissect the science. Emily Spurlock, R.D.N., is a registered dietitian with the Institute for Digestive Wellbeing. David Clarke, M.D., is board-certified in Internal Medicine and Gastroenterology and is the President of the Psychophysiology Disorders Association. Not to alarm you, but there’s a whole metropolis of tiny organisms—like bacteria, fungi, and viruses—in your digestive system, making up your gut microbiome (1). These microorganisms break down the food you eat and support your immune system, which keeps your digestion regular and healthy. So, why would knowing what’s living in your gut improve your health? Your gut microbiome is sensitive—anything from antibiotics and alcohol to a lack of sleep and stress can throw it out of balance. When your microbiome is out of whack, the levels of beneficial or harmful bacteria aren’t in harmony. An unbalanced gut microbiome can lead to common but uncomfortable symptoms like diarrhea, bloating, GERD, or constipation. There’s also a link between an unhealthy microbiome and chronic conditions like IBS, IBD, and type 2 diabetes (2). And here’s the kicker—research suggests that your gut microbiome doesn’t just help your digestion. A 2021 study found that healthy aging is linked with having a diverse microbiome (3). On the other hand, less diverse microbiomes were associated with unhealthy aging—which comes along with a higher risk for diseases like diabetes, cancer, and heart disease (4). Many at-home gut health tests claim to provide actionable recommendations to reverse or prevent both chronic and acute digestive issues. According to Emily Spurlock, R.D.N., the most common gut health test is a GI Map, which involves an at-home stool sample and tests for bacteria, viruses, yeast, and parasites. You can order it yourself or get a practitioner to order one for you. “A lot of people suffer from digestive issues and can’t ever seem to get any answers or find relief,” Spurlock says. “A GI Map test can help give someone more of a sense of control.” Other at-home gut health tests check for small intestinal bacterial overgrowth (SIBO) or food sensitivities, says Spurlock. At-home GI Map tests can range from \$129 to \$600 a pop. Other well-known gut health brands, like Viome, offer a subscription service that includes an annual gut health test and custom probiotics based on your results for around \$80 a month. Most at-home tests follow the same instructions: go number two as usual, use a small scoop or swap to collect a stool sample, seal your sample in a small vial, and then ship it back to the company to be tested in a lab. Weeks later, you’ll get a report detailing the type and number of certain microorganisms in your digestive system. Some companies also send you some diet and lifestyle recommendations, including your risk for certain conditions, based on your results. But gastroenterologist David Clarke, M.D., notes that each company uses different methods to identify what’s in your microbial profile. “This can give conflicting results,” warns Clarke. “[Many companies] analyze genetic material to identify what species of microbes are present. The challenge is that there are no widely agreed-upon standards for the best method.” While your microbiome health will likely become a part of regular, preventative care at some point, according to a 2021 review, doctors have yet to agree on how to diagnose and treat microbiome issues (5). That’s why many experts are reluctant to recommend pricey at-home gut health tests. “There is a wide range of microbiomes in people who are healthy and no scientific consensus on why one microbiome might be better than another,” Clarke explains. “So, in my opinion, these tests are not useful at this time and are unlikely to become helpful until we have a better understanding of what microbiomes are [considered] ‘healthy.’” Plus, your microbiome is constantly changing (6). A gut health test may only give you a snapshot of what microorganisms are hanging out in your digestive system on a given day. Hence, these tests aren’t FDA-approved and aren’t meant to be diagnostic tools. And when it comes to identifying exactly which tiny foes could be causing your digestive issues, the science simply isn’t there yet. Researchers have yet to uncover all of the species present in our guts—and 50 to 90 percent of these bacteria are “unculturable,” which makes it hard for scientists to identify them in a lab (7). Just because at-home tests aren’t the Holy Grail for gut health doesn’t mean your doctor can’t help you out. Clarke says that many gut doctors will order tests for specific bacteria—like *Clostridia*, *Campylobacter*, *H.pylori*—if they suspect an infection could be the cause of your symptoms. And not all experts turn their noses up at at-home gut health tests. In fact, Spurlock regularly recommends GI Map or SIBO tests as part of her dietetics practice. “If someone is suffering from digestive issues and can’t find relief, these tests can be beneficial in determining treatment options,” she says. However, she notes that not all gut health tests are helpful; you have to know what to do with the results. “I always caution people to make sure they’re working with someone who can read [an at-home gut health test] and help interpret it,” Spurlock says. “These tests need to be taken with a grain of salt.” If you’re interested in testing your microbiome, here are three popular gut health tests: While a healthy microbiome is important to maintain tip-top digestive health and longevity, the science isn’t quite there for most doctors to get completely on board with at-home gut health tests—yet. However, if you want to give one a try, it’s best to work with a healthcare provider who can help explain your results, and potentially treat anything it uncovers. Close BannerThis ad is displayed using third party content and we do not control its accessibility features.November 10, 2023We carefully vet all products and services featured on mindbodygreen using our commerce guidelines. Our selections are never influenced by the commissions earned from our links.The best at-home microbiome tests promise to provide insights into the state of your current gut health—and we do not control its accessibility features.Learning about your gut microbiome gives you insight into your overall health and well-being. To help you take your health to the next level, we spoke with experts and analyzed today’s at-home testing options, to find the best microbiome tests available right now.The best at-home microbiome testsMost comprehensive microbiome test: ViomeBest follow-up care microbiome test: BiohmBest budget microbiome test: OmbreBest subscription microbiome test: FloréWhat is a gut microbiome test?To put it simply, a gut microbiome test is a tool designed to help people better understand the composition of their gut microbiome. The process typically involves collecting a small sample of stool and sending it to a specialized lab for analysis. There are several methods available for assessing one’s gut microbiome, ranging from DNA sequencing to RNA analysis and metabolic profiling.By examining the genetic material, microbial diversity, and metabolic activity within the gut, these tests can reveal crucial information about an individual’s digestive health, potential imbalances, and even suggest dietary or lifestyle adjustments to optimize gut health.Save \$110 off all Viome tests: MBG110View on ViomeMost comprehensiveCollection methodStool sampleCoverageNot covered by health insurance, you may use HSA or FSA account to purchaseBiomarkers checkedBacteria, fungi, bacteriophages, viruses, parasites, archaeaProsMost comprehensive tests for multiple biomarkersQuick turnaroundClear & concise results with recommendationsConsNo follow-up with a medical professional offeredViome offers three options of at-home tests for gut health, including one that evaluates cellular and oral health. The most basic option, Gut Intelligence is the foundational gut health test.Although it requires a stool sample like other at-home options, it uses mRNA, rather than DNA, to test your gut microbiome.This testing format allows for a more detailed report, providing insights on your gut lining health, gas production, digestive processes, and immune response.Once you’ve sent in your stool sample, it’ll take about 2 to 3 weeks to receive results in a secure app. These results will outline your digestive deficiencies, as well as post-test recommendations for helping your gut.However, there’s no medical follow-up, so we recommend touching base with your primary care physician before making any changes to your routine—including subscribing to the brand’s recommended probiotics.Want to know more? Check out our full review of Viome’s Gut Intelligence Test, from a registered nurse.Best follow-up careCollection methodStool sampleCoverageNot covered by health insurance, you may use HSA or FSA account to purchaseBiomarkers checkedBacteria, fungiBiohm is a great option for those who want a more comprehensive understanding of their test results.When you send in your stool sample you’ll have two options to view your results: a \$130 test with written results and recommendations (similar to other brands) and a \$180 option with a live consultation. Biohm uses DNA to test for biomarkers. Just know that dead microorganisms can leave behind traces of DNA, which can be picked up by the testing method and can skew the results.Tests two biomarkersOffers a live consultation to review resultsUses DNA to testLongest estimated wait time for results (but still less than a month)Collection methodStool sampleCoverageNot covered by health insurance, you may use HSA or FSA account to purchaseBiomarkers checkedBacteria, fungi, viruses, parasites, yeastFloré is a newcomer with great potential in the at-home testing market. It also tests DNA for multiple biomarkers and offers one of the shortest waiting periods for results.Follow-up care is also a given, with an included “care scientist” available to review the results after your test. However, some reviews have mentioned being underwhelmed with the detail of the result report, mentioning that the results seem generic, rather than individually tailored.However, this brand is still a standout for those who want regular gut testing. With the Floré subscription service, you’ll pay a monthly \$79 subscription fee and receive a microbiome test every four months.A care scientist discusses your results with youMonthly subscription includes a test every 4 monthsAn individually-formulated probiotic, packaged as one pill a day, can be includedSome reviews mention a less-than-detailed results pageComparing the best microbiome testsProductPriceCollection methodResult timeTests for bacteriaTests for fungiTests for virusesTests for parasitesTests for yeastTests for archaeaViome\$249Stool sample2 to 3 weeksYesYesYesYesYesYesBiohm\$130Stool sample3 to 4 weeksYesYesNoNoNoNoOmbre\$100Stool sample2 to 3 weeksYesNoNoNoNoNoFloré\$169Stool sample1 to 3 weeksYesYesYesYesYesNoHow we picked the best at-home microbiome testsAccuracy: To get a clear picture of your gut health, you need an accurate test. We chose tests with high accuracy rates.Biomarkers tested: There is a vast range of what at-home tests include, so we made sure to point out these differences.Turnaround time: Stool samples inherently take longer than blood samples, but some brands are much quicker to return results than others. We’ve called this out below.Value: You get what you pay for. We want to make sure you are spending wisely and getting the most out of your test.What is the gut microbiome?The gut microbiome is the collective term used to refer to all the microorganisms including bacteria, fungi, and viruses in the intestines—affectionately known as the “gut.” In healthy digestive systems, all the microbes live in harmony, a pretty impressive feat considering there are over 100 trillion types of bacteria in the gut.However, any disruption to this delicate balance of good and bad bacteria can cause several harmful conditions, such as inflammatory bowel disease, irritable bowel syndrome, asthma, atherosclerosis, obesity, and metabolic disorders.Each person’s gut microbiome will have different components to accommodate regional diversity. Further, your unique dynamic gut flora demands will be based on specific environmental forces. What is considered a healthy gut one year may change the next.Njunge encourages consumers to think of the gut microbiome as a pivotal piece of your health, adding that, “If you take care of it, it will take care of you.”How to test your gut microbiomeGut microbiomes are tested using fecal matter. Yes, you will need to collect a sample of your poop. However, this non-invasive method allows the best insight into your digestive health.Certain at-home microbiome tests analyze only bacteria, while other, more comprehensive tests include bacteria, fungi, bacteriophages, viruses, parasites, and archaea.As with all non-diagnostic testing, it’s important to discuss results with a healthcare provider, since at-home tests don’t take into account family history, lifestyle, diet, etc to determine the cause of any symptoms.Equally important? Understanding that a single sample is unlikely to capture the full picture. Your gut microbiome is rapidly evolving based on a variety of factors, including diet, stress, and even age.As a result, a single sample may not capture a full picture of your body’s health. Our gastrointestinal tract also includes trillions of microbes, many of which a single test may be unlikely to track all these microorganisms, let alone identify them. These tests are also not FDA-approved and not considered diagnostic.Who should use an at-home microbiome test?At-home microbiome tests are a convenient and relatively inexpensive way to monitor your gut health. If you have been experiencing any digestive discomfort, testing your gut microbiome from the comfort of your home can have an enlightening impact on your overall health and wellness.The following are all potential signs of sub-optimal gut health:BloatingDiarrheaAbdominal pain or discomfortGasConstipationFatigueWeight fluctuationsSkin issuesMood disordersNjunge advises discussing your symptoms with your healthcare provider, explaining that there may be helpful clues in your history and physical examination that could lead to the need for more specialized testing.However, for a general overview of your gut health, or if you are simply looking to make better informed diet choices, an at-home gut microbiome test is a good starting point.Keep in mind, if you have recently finished a medication known to impact the gut biome, such as antibiotics, Njunge says it is wise to ask your doctor about those potential effects.Anyone experiencing severe digestive symptoms should consult with a medical professional. At-home tests are not a source of diagnostic testing and are not a replacement for traditional medical care.If you do opt for an at-home test, it’s also important to be able to analyze the results with your doctor, to better understand what’s going on and how to treat any abnormalities.Never start a new supplementation routine—especially one based off your gut microbiome tests—without connecting with a healthcare professional.When is the best time to test for microbiomes?Gut microbiome tests use a sample of stool. Due to these circumstances, it’s unlikely consumers can schedule their collection time. Fortunately, there is no consensus on the best time of day to test your gut microbiome. However, to get the most accurate results possible, Njunge suggests being mindful of the following:Take the test during a week that your diet is as near to normal as possible. You will not want to perform the test while you are outside your regular schedule as your diet may alter your biome and not be a true representation.Avoid taking the test when you are also taking medications or supplements that affect your microbiome, such as antibiotics or probiotics, as these will shift your results.Frequently Asked QuestionsNo, microbiome testing is not covered by insurance companies at this time. However, most at-home tests can be purchased with an HSA or FSA account. We recommend checking with your account carrier to confirm that at-home tests are considered a medical expense per their regulations.Yes, there are convenient at-home tests requiring a small stool sample to give you insight into your gut health. The tests use DNA or mRNA from bacteria and other biomarkers, sharing results about the balance of intestinal flora.Best is subjective, but our recommendation for the best value as well as the most comprehensive at-home test is Viome. It is the only brand that tests bacteria and fungi in addition to other biomarkers. Its turnaround time is comparable to others, and they have technologically advanced testing methods. Viome provides the most thorough testing and result explanations, and that is why we would recommend it as the best.An at-home gut microbiome test gives a snapshot of how the delicate balance of biomarkers is affecting the rest of your body. To get a full picture of your gut health, we recommend using a test that includes the most amount of biomarkers.What we’ve updated since publishing3/1/23: We added original imagery from our testers.This ad is displayed using third party content and we do not control its accessibility features. Your gut health plays a vital role in digestion, immunity, metabolism, and mental well-being. The gut microbiome houses trillions of bacteria that influence your overall health. If you’re experiencing issues like bloating, gas, irregular bowel movements, or unexplained fatigue, it might be time to test your gut microbiome.Gone are the days when you had to visit a clinic for gut microbiome analysis. Now, you can conveniently test your gut health at home using various methods, including stool sample tests, symptom analysis, and dietary tracking. Understanding what affects gut microbiome balance is crucial for maintaining optimal health.This step-by-step guide will help you understand how to test gut microbiome health at home, what signs to look for, and how to interpret results for better well-being. We’ll also explore the best food for gut microbiome health and when to consider a gut microbiome supplement.Why Test Your Gut Health?Your gut microbiome consists of trillions of bacteria, fungi, and other microbes that impact your overall health. Imbalanced gut bacteria can lead to digestive issues, weakened immunity, skin problems, and even mood disorders. A comprehensive microbiome gut test can provide valuable insights into your digestive health.Signs You Need a Gut Health TestFrequent bloating, gas, or acid refluxConstipation or diarrheaUnexplained fatigue or brain fogFood intolerances or sensitivities Poor immunity or frequent infections Unintentional weight changes Skin issues like acne or eczema Anxiety or mood swingsIf you experience any of these symptoms, it’s time to explore how to test gut microbiome health at home.Different Ways to Test Your Gut Health at HomeThere are multiple ways to evaluate your gut health at home. Here are the most effective methods:1. At-Home Stool Tests (Most Accurate Method)At-home microbiome gut test kits analyze your stool sample to assess your microbial composition. These tests detect good and bad bacteria, fungi, parasites, and digestive enzyme activity, providing a comprehensive overview of your microbiome gut health. Best for: People experiencing digestive issues, food intolerances, or immune system problems. Process: Collect a small stool sample, mail it to the lab, and receive a detailed gut health report with recommendations. Our Recommendation: GUT360 - A premium gut microbiome test that identifies 30+ gut health issues with expert consultation and personalized gut health microbiome diet recommendations.2. Gut Health Symptom TrackerIf you prefer a non-invasive method, tracking your symptoms can help identify gut imbalances. Understanding what affects gut microbiome balance can be partially determined through symptom tracking. Keep a journal for at least 2 weeks and note:✓ Digestive issues (bloating, gas, constipation, diarrhea)✓ Energy levels and mood changes✓ Food reactions and intolerances✓ Sleep patterns and immune function□ Best for: Early gut health assessment before taking a stool test.3. Elimination Diet for Food IntolerancesCertain foods can trigger inflammation, bloating, and digestive distress. An elimination diet can help you pinpoint food sensitivities and understand which food for gut microbiome health works best for your body.✓ Step 1: Remove common irritants (dairy, gluten, sugar, processed foods) for 2-4 weeks.✓ Step 2: Slowly reintroduce one food at a time and monitor your body’s reaction.✓ Step 3: Keep a record of symptoms and identify problematic foods.□ Best for: Those suspecting food intolerances or experiencing frequent bloating and discomfort.4. Gut Microbiome Diversity Score (DIY Test)A diverse diet supports a healthy gut microbiome. Assess your gut health by evaluating your dietary variety.✓ Step 1: Count the number of different plant-based foods (fruits, vegetables, nuts, seeds, legumes, whole grains) you eat in a week.✓ Step 2: Aim for at least 30 different plant-based foods per week for optimal microbiome gut health.✓ Step 3: If your diet lacks diversity, introduce more fiber-rich, probiotic, and prebiotic foods that support your gut health microbiome diet. Best for: Anyone looking to naturally improve gut health through diet.Step-by-Step Guide to Testing Your Gut Health with GUT360For a comprehensive and scientific gut microbiome analysis, we recommend the GUT360 test. Here’s how to test gut microbiome health with this advanced kit:Step 1: Order Your Kit Visit L&B Clinic and place your order for the GUT360 Gut Microbiome Test. Your microbiome gut test kit will be delivered to your doorstep with free two-way shipping.Step 2: Collect Your Stool Sample Use the collection tools provided in the kit. Follow the enclosed instructions to ensure a clean and accurate sample.Step 3: Send Your Sample Back Securely package your sample in the prepaid return box. Send it back to our lab for analysis.Step 4: Receive Your Results Within 2-3 weeks, you’ll get a detailed gut microbiome report. The report will include insights into your gut bacteria, food intolerances, digestion efficiency, and inflammation levels.Step 5: Get Expert Consultation Book a free consultation with a nutritionist to discuss your results. Receive personalized gut health microbiome diet recommendations, advice on gut microbiome supplement options, and lifestyle recommendations to improve gut health.How to Improve Your Gut Health After TestingOnce you’ve assessed your gut health, it’s time to take action. Here are some proven strategies to restore gut balance:1. Eat More Fiber-Rich Foods Whole grains, legumes, nuts, seeds, and vegetables feed beneficial gut bacteria and are essential food for gut microbiome health.2. Incorporate Probiotics & Prebiotics Probiotics: Found in yogurt, kefir, kombucha, and fermented foods. Prebiotics: Found in garlic, onions, bananas, and asparagus. Consider a gut microbiome supplement if dietary sources are insufficient.3. Avoid Processed & Sugary Foods Sugar feeds harmful bacteria, disrupting gut microbiome balance.4. Stay Hydrated Water helps digestion and maintains gut lining integrity, supporting overall gut health.5. Manage Stress Chronic stress affects gut bacteria, so practice meditation, yoga, or deep breathing. Stress is a significant factor in what affects gut microbiome balance.6. Exercise Regularly Physical activity promotes a diverse and healthy gut microbiome.7. Get Enough Sleep Poor sleep disrupts gut bacteria, so aim for 7-9 hours per night to maintain optimal microbiome gut health.Final ThoughtsTesting your gut health at home is easier than ever, with stool tests, symptom tracking, and diet assessments providing valuable insights into your gut microbiome. If you’re looking for the most accurate and actionable microbiome gut test, we recommend GUT360 for its detailed analysis, expert consultation, and personalized health recommendations.After testing, implement a balanced gut health microbiome diet, consider appropriate food for gut microbiome health, and explore gut microbiome supplement options if needed. Understanding what affects gut microbiome balance and how to test gut microbiome health are crucial steps toward achieving optimal digestive wellness. Ready to take control of your gut health? ✓ Order the GUT360 Gut Microbiome Test today! ✓ Book a consultation with a nutritionist for personalized gut health solutions!