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## **5R Protocol – Gut Health**

During a recent BCPVPA “Leading Through Midlife” webinar, Dr. Nishi Dhawan from the Westcoast Women’s Clinic mentioned the **5R Protocol** for restoring gut health. Back in March 2021, we published a ReFresh article called [“Go With Your Gut”](#), which introduced how developing and maintaining the biome of your digestive track is critical to your health. Interested to learn more, I began researching the 5R Protocol.

The 5R Protocol is designed to be a personalized plan that often requires professional guidance to identify your specific gut imbalances and is tailored to your nutritional needs. It is strongly recommended to work with a qualified health professional when implementing the 5R Protocol to ensure propose dosage of antimicrobial supplements and to avoid unnecessary restrictions.

### **What is the 5R Protocol**

The 5R Protocol is a functional medicine framework used to restore gut health and address chronic inflammation by identifying root causes of digestive dysfunction. The five steps include:

- **Remove**
- **Replace**
- **Reinoculate**
- **Repair**
- **Rebalance**

This structured approach is intended to address gut issues like bloating and food sensitivities by modifying diet and lifestyle.

## The 5R Steps Explained

**Remove:** This first step involves removing all foods that cause you to react (food additives, sugar, alcohol, preservatives, or coffee), or where you have an intolerance or sensitivity (gluten, dairy, or eggs). Removal also involves the elimination of pathogens (yeast, bacteria, parasites, or viruses), the reduction of microbiome disturbing toxins in the environment (pesticides, plastics, or chemicals in cosmetics) and the review of medications that may alter gastrointestinal function (painkillers, anti-inflammatories, or antibiotics).

Stress also has a direct impact on gut permeability due to the release of cortisol, our body's stress hormone, which can damage the gut lining and lead to systemic inflammation. Reducing stress is important to the removal of excess cortisol in your gut!

**Replace:** This step involves replacing essential digestive elements needed for proper function, including digestive enzymes (bitters, pancreatic enzymes), supports for stomach acid levels (hydrochloric acid, digestive bitters, apple cider vinegar), and support for bile levels and flow (choline, glycine, and taurine). A functional medicine physician or naturopathic doctor can perform comprehensive stool testing that determines the appropriate therapy for digestion or absorption insufficiencies.

**Reinoculate:** The third step focuses on restoring the balance of beneficial bacteria in your gut microbiome. A healthy microbiome is essential for digestion, immunity, and mental clarity. This step includes reinoculating your gut with beneficial bacteria via fermented foods, probiotics, and prebiotics to restore a healthy, balanced microbiome.

- **Probiotics:** beneficial bacteria that improve digestion, thereby reducing digestive symptoms and helping to improve the absorption of vitamins. The most common of these beneficial bacteria are those belonging to groups called Lactobacillus and Bifidobacterium. These are available in supplemental form, or through yoghurt, cultured vegetables and fermented foods: kombucha, kimchi, kefir, and sauerkraut.
- **Prebiotics:** fibres that selectively stimulate the growth or activity of desirable microorganisms. Prebiotic rich foods include leeks, garlic, onions, asparagus, Jerusalem artichoke, chicory root, and green banana.

**Repair:** The repair phase is about healing and regenerating your gut lining. Nutritional supplements like glutamine, zinc, and omega-3 fatty acids can soothe inflammation and strengthen your gut barrier. The

repair phase focuses on what is needed to repair and regenerate a healthy mucous layer and gut lining, and what is also needed to optimize immune function with specific nutrients.

The integrity of the gut mucosa is restored by providing various substances (L-glutamine, deglycyrrhizinated licorice, bone broth, herbs, vitamins, essential fatty acids) that assist in repairing the gut lining. Immune support (colostrum, immunoglobulins) can also help repair the integrity of the gut.

**Rebalance:** The final step of the 5R Protocol focuses on your overall lifestyle. Stress management, sleep hygiene, regular exercise, and mindfulness practices are all vital for maintaining a healthy gut. Whole body health and lifestyle factors are needed to support gut healing and to prevent future gut dysfunction.

### 5R Protocol Customized to You!

The 5R Protocol can significantly improve many areas of your life. You may notice:

- Better energy and focus
- Relief from bloating, gas, or constipation
- Fewer food sensitivities and intolerances
- Clearer skin and reduced inflammation
- Improved immune function and resilience
- A brighter mood and reduced anxiety

Keeping your gut healthy improves your digestion, strengthens your immune system and hormone production, and supports brain, nervous, and respiratory system health.

### Sources

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A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'R. Morandini', with a stylized flourish at the end.

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If you would like to contribute or have ideas about what you would like to see in the ReFresh series, we would love to hear from you: contact [rochelle@bcpvpa.bc.ca](mailto:rochelle@bcpvpa.bc.ca).