

# Gut Tales

Ravi Bhatia

## ABSTRACT

What is the gut? The Webster's English Dictionary defines it as a tube in the body through which the food passes after it leaves the stomach. Though I love words and playing with them, this write-up is not meant for that. It is instead meant to look into a word that affects all of us, the gut. A different view of the gut.

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What is the gut? Webster's English Dictionary defines it as a tube in the body through which the food passes after it leaves the stomach. Though I love words and playing with them, this write-up is not meant for that. It is instead meant to look into a word that affects all of us, the gut.

For those who are into gastroenterology, the gut is a means for earning bread and butter (with due apologies). From a thing as innocuous as dysbiosis to something as sinister as acute pancreatitis, you need the help of gastro people to solve the mess. However, over the years, the word gut has crept into our lingua franca and now is a part of many different phrases and idioms.

As a child, I often found my mother, who was a renowned gynecologist, saying, "I have a gut feeling that this patient might turn out to be ectopic. Shift her to the operation theater as soon as possible." Most often than not, her gut feeling used to be correct. Trying to impress my mother with my fast-growing knowledge of biology, I used to say, "Mummy, the intestines and ovaries are way apart; how could it be related to your field?" To which my mother would smile and say, "Pet vaali gut nahin hai yeh, heart vali gut hai." She was referring to the gut feeling one develops over years of experience. See now the gut has a connection with our mind as well!

When I was filling up my Armed Forces Medical College (AFMC) entrance exam form, my father came from behind and said, "I have a gut feeling that you would get through." His feeling came true, and I landed at the premier temple of medicine called AFMC. See, now the gut is connected to the heart. Gastroenterologists would be at their wit's end to explain this phenomenon.

As a young boy growing up, I used to be glued to the television watching cricket matches. I still remember that fateful day when India was playing their archrivals Pakistan in the finals of the AustralAsia cup, and by batting first, they had piled up a mammoth score. Pakistan was down and out until the wily old fox Miandad played a stellar knock and slammed Chetan Sharma for a last-ball six to win it for Pakistan. I was gutted, and so was the whole nation. Even feelings have a gut relation, don't they?

Residency can be a challenging experience, especially when the Chief has a bias against you. In my case, it was true. Day in, day out, I found myself victimized and humiliated till one day, I approached the head and vented out my ire by saying, "You should have the guts to admit that you are being unfair to me." The next thing that followed was I was out of the department for a week. The boss had shown his guts, and I was out. See, sometimes the gut can land you in the wrong place.

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One of the magazines I regularly subscribed to was Sportstar. Every week I used to wait for the postman to bring me the latest issue of the magazine, which I would finish in a couple of hours. One of the most sought-after columns was "guts and glory," which would feature an athlete or a sportsman who had shown real courage in times of adversity to win medals for the nation. So friends to achieve something, you need guts.

As a child, I played badminton quite often and was decent at it. However, seeing my over bulging waistline, people would find it hard to believe but still I loved the sport. During the course of play, the strings of my racket broke, and seeing me crestfallen, my father asked what the problem was, to which I replied about the racket being broken. On seeing the racket, he corrected me by saying, "Nope, the gut strings are broken. We would get it repaired." Now the gut has a sporting connection.

I have always believed that languages are constantly moving. They keep evolving newer words, phrases and idioms are added day in, day out, and the gut is not far behind in contributing to the richness of the English language.

I have been a reluctant traveler my entire life, so more often than not, it is a herculean task for my wife to move me out of my comfort zone for a trip. With the rain gods being generous, it was one of those days when the family decided to go out on a trip. While driving down across the wilderness, I trusted my gut feeling and took the wrong turn, ending up in the middle of nowhere. Obviously, my wife was gutted as the trip was spoilt.

This gut business is getting confusing. It was my "gut feeling" that this discourse on gut would bring a smile to your face.

(The writer is a pediatrician by profession and works as a professor in the department of pediatrics at a medical college.)