“If I knew I was going to live this long, I’d have taken better care of myself.”

—Mickey Mantle

Short of quitting drinking, what can we do to take the best possible care of our livers? And our guts in general? First, we can appreciate them. As with most of our internal organs, we don’t think about the liver unless it malfunctions. The liver has a lot of work to do. It cleans the blood, helps maintain blood sugar levels, produces bile that digests fat, stores vitamins and minerals, and does a whole bunch of other stuff. Love your liver and protect it. Keep it safe from inflammatory diets, dehydration, and too much booze. Don’t get punched, stabbed, or shot.

Also, take care of your gut, literally. Excess alcohol not only damages the gut wall, but also disrupts the natural population of microbes that live in your intestines, aka your gut microbiome. The more and longer we drink, the worse it gets. There are trillions of living microbes in our guts, and they’re vital for keeping us healthy. Research also shows that the connection between the gut and brain works both ways, each affecting the functioning of the other. Things that hurt our guts also hurt our brains, and vice versa. Stress causes gastrointestinal problems. Gut microbes produce neurotransmitters, including GABA (gamma-aminobutyric acid), which helps control anxiety and fear. The biochemistry is complex.

Learn about the physical and mental health effects of overdrinking. When I was younger, I never gave it a thought beyond the self-evident pain of a hangover, but that has changed. If you’ve been around as long as I have, you know that it takes longer to recover from a night of hard partying. Educate yourself well on the subject of excessive drinking and its effects on the body and mind. Pay attention to how you feel. Love, appreciate, and care for your body!