

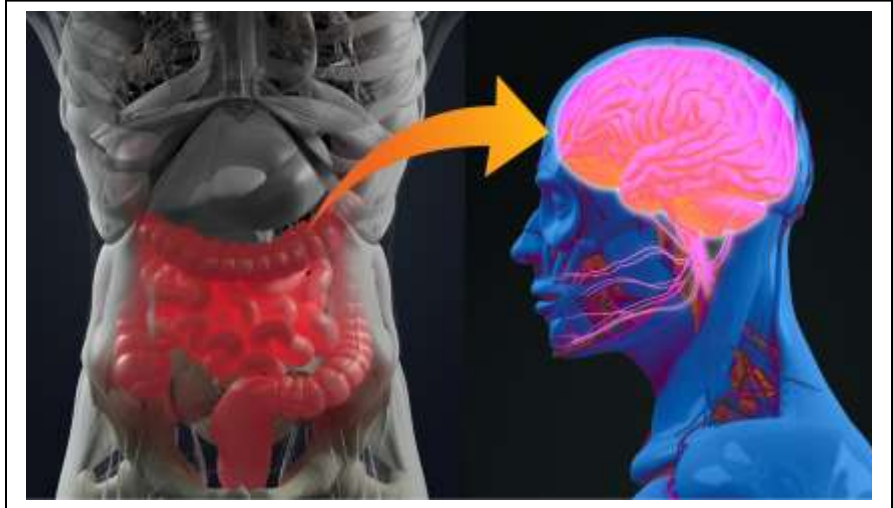
## Understanding Gut Health

*Did you know that how you feel every day is directly linked to your gut health? Making small dietary changes can promote a healthy gut, which can lead to a happier brain.*

### What does “gut health” mean?

Gut health is the balance of microorganisms (bacteria, yeast, viruses), that reside in the digestive track.

Microorganisms are also referred to as the “gut flora.” Many microorganism are beneficial to your health, but others, especially when multiplied, can be harmful. You can take charge of your gut health by maintaining the right balance of microorganisms.



### The brain-gut connection: Link between mental and digestive health

The brain-gut relationship is directly intertwined. This relationship can link anxiety to stomach problems and vice versa. Commonly used expressions such as having a "gut-wrenching" experience, describing situations that make you "feel nauseous" and even feeling "butterflies" in your stomach are used for a reason. The gastrointestinal tract is sensitive to emotion. The full spectrum of emotions -- anger, anxiety, sadness, happiness --can trigger symptoms in the gut.

The brain has a direct effect on the stomach and intestines. For example, the very thought of eating can release the stomach's juices before food gets there. This connection goes both ways. A troubled intestine can send signals to the brain, just as a troubled brain can send signals to the gut. Therefore, a person's stomach or intestinal distress can be the cause or the product of anxiety, stress or depression. That is because the brain and the gastrointestinal (GI) system are intimately connected. This directly comes into play when an individual with unexplained gastrointestinal pain or distress cannot find the root medical cause of his or her symptoms. It can be difficult to heal an unhealthy gut without first examining the role of stress levels and emotions.

### How is your emotional well-being connected to your gut health?

The gut is comprised of thousands of “good” and “bad” bacteria. When in harmony, and beneficial bacteria is plentiful, the amount of bad bacteria—which can be detrimental to your health--declines. Any disruption to the normal, healthful balance of bacteria in the gut can cause the immune system to overreact and contribute to inflammation of the GI tract. In turn, this leads to the development of

symptoms of disease that occur not only throughout your body, but also in your brain, such as depression and anxiety.

### Signs your gut may need some TLC:

- |                    |   |                       |
|--------------------|---|-----------------------|
| ✓ Headaches        | ✓ Crying  | ✓ Sleep problems      |
| ✓ Trouble relaxing | ✓ Nervousness                                   | ✓ Weight loss or gain |
| ✓ Procrastination  | ✓ Quick temper                                  | ✓ Grinding teeth      |
| ✓ Depression       | ✓ Difficulty completing work assignments        | ✓ Poor concentration  |
| ✓ Memory loss      | ✓ Changes in amount of alcohol or food consumed |                       |

### What can you do to flourish your gut health?

In order to restore and promote a healthy gut environment, it is important to consume a healthy, balanced diet that is rich in fiber and omega-3 fatty acids. Food sources rich in Omegas (salmon, flax seeds, mackerel) can help reduce inflammation in the gut and improve digestion.

Probiotics and prebiotics coordinate to promote a healthy gut environment. Probiotics are live bacteria that are beneficial to the body, while prebiotics are a type of fiber that promotes the growth of healthy bacteria in the body. The indigestible fiber found in prebiotics ferments within the GI tract, where probiotic bacteria converts them to healthier substances in the gut. Optimal high-fiber food choices include: oats, peas, avocados, bananas, berries, broccoli, and whole grains.

Sources of Probiotics: kefir, plain cottage cheese, sauerkraut, kombucha, plain yogurt, apple cider vinegar, and miso. Probiotics can also be purchased in supplement form.

Sources of Prebiotics: leeks, garlic, artichokes, onion, chicory, asparagus, legumes, oats and cabbage.

#### References:

<https://www.psycom.net/the-gut-brain-connection>

<https://www.health.harvard.edu/diseases-and-conditions/the-gut-brain-connection>