



Psychotherapy and Your Gut Health



Lou Patchitt - Nutritionist & Clinical Psychotherapist and Hypnotherapist

The Gut Brain Connection – Understanding the reasons why.



The brain and the gut are connected through the vagus nerve which runs from the brain stem down to the colon. Its function is to transmit energy signal through the nerves which is responsible for communication pathways. These can include how fast things move through the body, how you process waste, how much inflammation you experience and much more.

You may have experienced the ‘butterflies’ in your stomach or have a strong feeling in your stomach about something. Well it isn’t a coincidence it is our ‘second brain’ and more research is linking our three brains, our head, our heart and our guts together with indication that the ‘gut brain’ is the most evolved out of our three brains.

Science is uncovering the connection between our guts and our emotions. The brain and the gut connection are so strong, so much so that research indicated this connection affects the gut microbiome as much as it does for the food we eat.

Your gut is home to the enteric nervous system (ENS) (not to be confused with the central nervous system CNS). Located within your ENS are more than 100 million nerve cells. The function of these cells is to line the gastrointestinal (GI) tract, control blood flow and secretions to help the GI tract in digesting foods consumed. The ‘gut feeling’

LOU PATCHITT - NUTRITIONIST & CLINICAL PSYCHOTHERAPIST and HYPNOTHERAPIST

Email: lighter4life@yahoo.com

Tel: 0450 643 425

Web: www.Lighter4Life.com.au

is more that your food being digested. Your gut communicates through signals that go up and down the vagus nerve highway like 24/7 rush hour traffic.

How the brain and gut affect moods?

Stress is a big factor in people's life by one form or another. The stress levels we experience are not only physical with elevated biomedical markers such as; high blood pressure, rapid breathing, sweating etc but stress is also psychological from worrying a little to experiencing periods of high anxiety. It is during this period when you physical and psychological are intimately tied to our guts. You may have heard of the terms

flight, fight or freeze stages as a result of our stress responses. Your cortisol (hormone) levels raise as an automatic response in the fight of flight situations When something scares you or worrying happens, you take flight and look for an escape.



Either way when either of these things happen a physiological trigger start firing on all cylinders and you experience symptoms such as sweaty palms, pounding chest, heart beating in your ears etc.

This said it the situation that has made you feel stressed diffuses, then your body reverts back to the normal way of being without causing any issues.

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On the other hand, if you're constantly stressed, this isn't good for you and your brain and gut nerve sensors will start to become heightened. This is because your body is now stuck in that fight or flight mode over a normal period of time such as an extended period of time. The critical part is that our bodies are unable to distinguish between physical and mental stress.

Research has linked causes of stress becomes the trigger in developing chronic inflammation. When we have chronic inflammation our body's cry for help is to react to the stress as a type of infection and tries to overcome it. Because inflammation is at the foundation of many diseases, this enormous prolonged exposure to stress will ultimately effect your health, ranging from high blood pressure to autoimmune disorders.

This in turn starts to upset and can destroy your gut microbiota. The types of bacteria found in the gut, often referred to as the "good bacteria", plays a pivotal role in how your immune responses are regulated.

A study on the use of probiotics proved how the gut and brain are connected through reviewing the effects on patients with irritable bowel syndrome (IBS) and depression. Researchers found that twice as many patients saw improvements from depression when they took a probiotic as compared to the other patients who took a placebo. This study indicated with an improved gut, came an improvement of mental wellbeing. In

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this research study the patients consumed the probiotic Bifidobacterium longum NCC3001 daily. (1)

Feed Your Gut-Brain Connection

With so much more still to uncover through gut-brain connection along with the gut's microbiome, the research and all it affects is a very exciting area of interest. What we do know is how food, moods and inflammation are affected.



Here are Lighter4Life's top 5 things you should do to improve your gut-brain connection.

1. Avoid Processed Foods

A balanced diet rich in whole foods groups will lead to a gut with a much different makeup than one that's been fed mainly refined and processed foods.



¹ Probiotic Bifidobacterium longum NCC3001 Reduces Depression Scores and Alters Brain Activity: A Pilot Study in Patients with Irritable Bowel Syndrome. <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/28483500> - accessed 02/03/19

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2. Eat & Drink Probiotics

Eating and drinking probiotic-rich foods, like kefir (Turkish Yoghurt) and sauerkraut, actually allow your gut and mood to thrive. Probiotics are renowned to be the ‘good bacteria’. This is because they primarily line your gut and are responsible for nutrient absorption and supporting your immune system. Your body needs different food groups to enable the various enzymes to create and activate your various gut bacteria to work effectively for your health.

3. Eat Healthy Fats

Healthy fats are essential for brain development. Olive oil, has been used for centuries and has a number of evidence-based research linked to how beneficial it is for your health and well-being. Olive oil includes a high number of antioxidants that protect your cells from damage. It also



also aids in improved memory and cognitive function, and works as an a very powerful anti-inflammatory. Avocado benefits range from protecting your heart to helping with digestion, but it’s also renowned for improving your mood.

4. Eat Nuts and Seeds

Nuts are packed full of goodness from the serotonin (feel-good molecule that comes from the amino acid derivative (tryptophan), fibre, vitamins and minerals – see extensive list below in table 1).



Sesame Seeds for example stem from a chemical called tyrosine, another type of amino acid that boosts the brain's dopamine levels. Dopamine is the feel-good hormone and this kicks in to action while balancing out the others hormones.

- ✓ Almonds: protein, calcium and vitamin E
- ✓ Brazil nuts: fibre and selenium: just two brazil nuts a day provides 100% RDI for selenium for an adult
- ✓ Cashews: non-haem (plant based) iron and a low GI rating
- ✓ Chestnuts: low GI, fibre and vitamin C (although much vitamin C is lost during cooking)
- ✓ Hazelnuts: fibre, potassium, folate, vitamin E
- ✓ Macadamias: highest in monounsaturated fats, thiamine and manganese
- ✓ Pecans: fibre and antioxidants
- ✓ Pine nuts: vitamin E and the arginine amino acid.
- ✓ Pistachios: protein, potassium, plant sterols and the antioxidant resveratrol
- ✓ Walnuts: alpha linoleic acid: plant omega 3 and antioxidants

5. De-stress, relax and have good quality sleep.

As discussed earlier the effects both physical and psychological aspects of stress on your body is not good for you. To combat this effect de-stressing is essential and learning to relax in a safe environment is the key. Afterall, if you are unable to de-stress you can't relax which in turn means you can't get any form of quality sleep happening.

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A proven method for a balance of gut health and stress is the combination of psychotherapy and hypnotherapy. This combination has been shown to reduce levels of anxiety being experienced by working with you to understand the triggers.

Through experiencing hypnosis, you enter a state of trance, a very deep state of relaxation. This therapy works with you and your subconscious to reduce your anxiety and leave you feeling light and at ease after the therapy has taken place.

Studies continue to show IBS symptoms are greatly reduced as part of this therapeutic treatment, which in turn relaxes the GI tract and eases the symptoms of discomfort and allows your gut microbiota to get back on track.

We don't have all the answers on the gut-mood link just yet, but one thing is certain: our bodies and minds are much more connected than you believe. Taking care of one part will reap benefits for the rest of you.

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