

What the Gut?

How Emotional Well-being is Connected to Digestive Health

Ever felt butterflies in your stomach? Noticed your stomach twisting into knots when something doesn't seem quite right? Ever "trusted your gut" when making decisions? Those physical manifestations are the result of your digestive system and your nervous system (which includes your brain) working in tandem.

In fact, the gut is sometimes referred to as the "second brain", which might help explain that our gut health and our emotional health are so closely intertwined.



A Mini Biology Lesson: What is the Gut Microbiome and Gut-Brain Axis?

Your gut microbiome is made up of trillions of microorganisms housed in your intestinal tract. Microorganisms play a vital role in not only digestion but immune function, and the production of neurotransmitters that affect mood, such as serotonin and dopamine. The gut microbiome is a delicate balance. It should include an abundance of the "good" (health promoting) bacteria, and a lower number of "bad" bacteria (disease-inducing). This is because the gut is connected to the brain via the Gut-Brain Axis, which is a pathway via the bloodstream that allows these organs to communicate with and influence one another.

The Consequences of an Imbalance in the Gut

An imbalance in the gut microbiome can lead to chronic inflammation, which is associated with:

- Mood Disruptions, such as depression and anxiety.
- Cognitive Changes, including a higher incidence of cognitive decline in older age. Cognitive changes in the short term can tie back to our ability to focus and concentrate, causing decision making and learning to be more difficult.

What Can We Do to Help Keep our Gut Balance Healthy?

The good news? We have a lot of influence on our gut health. Nutrition and other healthy habits play a major role in a healthy gut.

- **Eat a balanced diet:** What we eat also gets fed to all the microorganisms living in our digestive tract. A diet rich in fiber, fruits, and vegetables is the most effective way to keep your gut balance healthy. Avoid processed foods, sugar, and artificial sweeteners, which are the biggest culprits in upsetting the balance.
- **Take probiotic/prebiotic supplements:** Probiotics are live microorganisms that can promote a healthy gut. Prebiotics are a type of non-digestible fiber that act as food for gut microbes, helping them grow and flourish. There are ways to supplement these naturally through diet, by eating certain foods, such as yogurt, cottage cheese, and sauerkraut. Many fruits and vegetables also help healthy microbes grow.
- **Check for food intolerances:** Healthy food can be medicine, but for some, certain foods may trigger an imbalance or inflammation within the gut. If you're experiencing symptoms like acid reflux, fatigue, gas, nausea, or bloating, you may have food sensitivity or intolerance. Try eliminating common trigger foods like dairy, gluten, or caffeine to see if your symptoms improve, or talk to your doctor about your symptoms.
- **Manage stress:** Chronic stress can wreak havoc on our minds and bodies, leading to more inflammation. Prioritize self-care and practice stress management techniques such as meditation, yoga, or deep breathing. Create a self-care plan that includes tools that work for you when the going gets rough.
- **Get enough sleep:** Sleep is crucial for overall health, including gut health. Aim for 7-9 hours per night. If you have trouble with your sleep, consider learning strategies to improve your evening sleep routine.
- **Exercise regularly:** Exercise is the single best thing we can do to ensure better health, lower stress, and inflammation levels. So, find ways to move every day. Aim for at least 30 minutes of moderate exercise each day. If 30 minutes feels difficult, try breaking it up into 3, 10-minute intervals at various points during the day. Finding activities, you enjoy is the key to staying consistent.

Talk with your doctor for more insights on how to ensure your gut health. Contact Ulliance for counseling or coaching to help improve your stress, manage your emotions, and incorporate additional healthy habits into your everyday life.

**For more information, tools, resources, or app information, call your
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for you & your family.**

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