

Healthy GUT for healthy Brain & Mood

Our brain and our digestive system (or GUT) communicate back and forth along a large nerve called the Vagus Nerve.

Our GUT health and what we eat and drink influences our clarity of thinking, how our brain operates and general mood, AND our brain also communicates back to the GUT via this Vagus Nerve.

We have billions of microbes and bacteria living inside our gut which have many functions. These influence our energy, thinking and mood as well as regulating immunity, hormones and inflammation throughout the body.

How we look after our gut, our microbes and this nerve, will determine how we feel.

Who are you feeding when you eat?

Feeding your body with food feeds the microbes with fuel & information resulting in either brain fuel or brain fog.

Our body is made up of microbes/bacteria, outnumbering other types of tissue in the body 10:1. Only a small number of these individual microbes have been researched – BUT the discovery is that each microbe has a specific role in functioning to protect us and keep us well.

What is a microbiome?

These microbes (or bacteria) + their genes or DNA + their environment they live in + the chemicals they produce or excrete = The microbiome

We have microbiomes throughout our body - in our brain, nasal cavities, reproductive and urinary systems, our skin and of course our GUT.

Most of our feel good “mood” chemicals (called neurotransmitters) such as serotonin, GABA, norepinephrine, dopamine, acetylcholine and melatonin are made in the GUT and are produced by the microbes through what we feed them.

BRAIN FUEL OR BRAIN FOG

Every meal counts ... Brain/GUT/Immune System Connection.

- Current research indicates the human body is made up of more than 90% bacteria and only 10% of less other tissue. Some research indicates it is closer to 99% bacteria and 1% tissue.
- More than 95% of this bacteria is found in our digestive system – this is our GUT microbiome
- 80% of our immune system function happens within our GUT

- Healthy GUT through what we feed it = healthy brain/thinking/mood/energy and Immunity

4 key things you can do to improve your brain via your GUT....

1. Tone your Vagus Nerve by having some fun!

With the Vagus Nerve being the master communicator between the gut and brain, it's important to look after this nerve so it sends messages effectively. Exercises to help it function at its best are usually both fun and silly (and often relaxing), and revolve around anything that regulates both the breath and the heart rate.

In particular, we are aiming at actions that expand your heart rate variability. Which means after a stress or shock, how quickly you can get your heart rate back to base line soon after the stimulation. Some of the tips below can help with this....

Singing or humming have a soothing and positive effect on this nerve and therefore try humming along to a song for a few minutes twice a day, perhaps in the shower or in the car. Or taking deep, deliberate breaths from your belly, with a focus on making the exhale slow and steady and a little longer than the inhale.

2. Feed your bugs

Our gut bugs LOVE to eat fibre, in particular resistant starch.

Examples:

- Cooked and cooled white rice
- Cooked and cooled potato
- Cooked and cooled pasta
- Legumes (chickpeas, lentils, any bean)
- Slightly green banana in smoothie (or the flour)

BUT go slow & small amounts – our bugs need training to break down this fibre. Research shows that only 1 teaspoon of cooked and cooled mash potato or rice per day is necessary for feeding these bugs. So, it's not about quantity – it's about variety and quality.

Resistant starch provides loads of fuel for our bugs to make the important 'feel good' chemicals (or neurotransmitters) for the brain to function well.

3. Eat a rainbow

Every colour you see in the fruits, vegetables, spices, herbs and whole grains you eat has a positive chemical message for our gut bugs. In each meal, aim to eat a high variety of plant foods and in as many colours as possible – try for at least 7 colours

every day of the week. The more diversity in colour, means the more diversity in variety of good gut bugs. Eat greens, reds, whites, purples/blues/blacks, yellows and oranges. The blue/purple/black is probably the most potent for our GUT health and therefore our brain health. The more variety and colour, the better your brain and mood. Give yourself a challenge and aim for 30-40 colours each week.

More diverse gut microbes/good bugs = more 'feel good' chemicals (neurotransmitters) for your brain.

This means better thinking, mental clarity, better & stable moods, better energy, better overall health, less inflammation and as a result, more productivity.

You're sweet enough

Our gut bugs don't like added sugar. Sugar feeds the 'bad' bugs in our gut crowding out the good bugs. These bad bugs make chemicals that make our brain sleepy and mood low. Aim for no more than 6 teaspoons per day for adults. To beat the craving, add good fats like olive oil or avocado, some protein and some colourful plants to your plate.

Top tips for reading food labels when it comes to sugar:

- **Start at the very beginning.** Items on food labels are listed in order from largest to smallest by weight. If one or more of the names for sugar feature towards the start of the list, that's a sign that the product is high in added sugar.
- **Red alert words.** Words like "syrup" and "sugar" are highly likely to mean added sugar. Anything described as "crystals" or "concentrate" is suspect as well. See a thorough list on [That Sugar Film](#) website.
- **An "ose" by any other name....** Words ending in "ose" often mean added sugar. Dextrose, maltose, sucrose are just a few.
- **4 grams of sugar = 1 teaspoon.**

DRINK FRESH WATER FOR BRAIN HEALTH – Our brain is designed to crave sweet foods or dumb carbs before we drink water (its just how our brain is wired). So, we have to ask ourselves "have we had enough water" before reaching for that sweet biscuit at afternoon tea? Average 2 L per day but this depends on your environment and the amount you exercise.

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