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Understanding the Brain – Gut Connection

The connection between your brain and gut is stronger than you might think. While your brain communicates with all of your body through your nervous system, your brain and your gut are like besties. This connection is so strong that it's often called the "brain-gut axis." This communication network links your digestive system and your brain through nerves, hormones, and chemical signals.

Your gut is home to trillions of bacteria that make up the gut microbiome, which helps regulate digestion, immune function, and even mood. In fact, many of the body's neurotransmitters, including serotonin, are produced in the gut. This means your daily habits can directly influence both gut health and overall well-being.

When your gut is healthy, it supports better digestion, a stronger immune system, and improved mood. On the flip side, an imbalanced gut may contribute to feelings of stress, anxiety, or fatigue.

What you eat obviously plays a key role in gut health. Other everyday habits, like managing stress, not smoking, staying hydrated and getting adequate rest, help keep this important connection running smoothly.

Daily exercise is another key player in gut health. Regular physical activity helps promote the growth of beneficial bacteria, supports digestion, can reduce inflammation in the body, and helps manage stress.

Your digestive tract is a muscle, and we know that moving your body is good for all your muscles. When you are physically inactive, the muscles in your gut also become less active and, over time,

they lose their natural coordination and strength. Your digestive tract actually has its own rhythm. When it's too fast, you may find yourself running to the bathroom. When it is too slow, you feel bloating, gas, pain, and nausea.

By taking small, intentional steps to incorporate healthy everyday habits, you can support this important brain — gut connection and improve both your physical and mental health.



Walk Kansas Learning Lounge

Webinar time: Wednesdays at 12:10p.m.
(room opens at 12, noon)

April 29: Good Gut Health

May 6: Kindness at Work



Link to join or scan the QR code:
ksu.zoom.us/j/92803723573

All webinars will be recorded.

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Issued in furtherance of Cooperative Extension work, acts of May 8 and June 30, 1914, in cooperation with the U.S. Department of Agriculture, Director of Extension, Kansas State University, County Extension Councils, Extension Districts. Kansas State University is an equal opportunity provider and employer.

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Stretch and Strengthen Your Hip Flexor

Hip flexors are a group of muscles that allow you to lift your knees toward your chest and to bend forward from the hips. Tight hip flexors are a common problem for people who spend a lot of time in a seated position. As a result of these muscles being tight, you could also have low back pain, hip pain, and injury. Simple hip strengthening and stretching exercises can keep these muscles from getting tight and can reduce your risk of injury and pain.

Hip Flexor Stretches

Seated Butterfly Stretch

This is a good stretch for your inner thighs, hips, and lower back. When doing this stretch, make sure you lean forward from your hips rather than rounding out your lower back.

1. Sit on the floor with your back straight, soles of your feet pressed together, and your knees dropped to the sides as far as they will comfortably go.
2. Tighten your abdominal muscles. Grasp your feet and ankles and slowly lean forward, keeping your spine straight. Hold this pose for 10 to 30 seconds.

To reduce stress on your knees, move your feet away from your body. To increase the stretch, move your feet toward your body. Here is a demonstration of the [Seated Butterfly Stretch](#).

Standing Lunge Stretch

Lunges are great leg and glute exercises, and they can also serve as a hip flexor stretch. You should feel this stretch in your hip flexors, groin, and inner thighs.

1. Stand up straight with your arms at your sides.
2. Place your hands on your hips or on your forward knee.
3. Take a long step forward with your right foot so you are standing in a split stance.
4. Lower your right knee so it is at a 90-degree angle. Your left leg is extended straight back behind you.
5. Hold the stretch for 20 to 30 seconds.
6. Release and repeat on the other side.

Gut Feelings – The Secret to Better Health

A happy, healthy gut is important to your overall health. The gut is responsible for digesting food, absorbing nutrients, and eliminating waste. It is made up of the gastrointestinal (GI) tract, including your stomach and your small and large intestines.

About 100 trillion bacterial cells, or microbiota, live within your GI tract. Microbiota help you in various ways, and they can:

- improve your immune system;
- help you absorb nutrients;
- form a protective barrier in your intestine to keep harmful bacteria from latching on; and
- contribute to formation of new cells in the intestine.

It is important to maintain the right diversity of microorganisms in your gut. Diet, inflammation, illness, stress, and antibiotic use can impact the mix of microorganisms. Imbalance in your gut can result in diarrhea, abdominal pains, and cramping.

Healthy, whole, plant-based foods high in fiber support good gut bacteria, so include whole grains, fruits, vegetables, and legumes in your diet. Here are several more ways to keep your gut in good condition:

- Eat more prebiotic foods, like oats, barley, wheat, apples, bananas, onions, garlic, broccoli, asparagus, legumes, honey, and nuts. These provide non-digestible dietary fibers and food for the “good” bacteria in the intestine.
- Eat more probiotic foods that contain live, beneficial microorganisms. Probiotics are naturally found in fermented food products like yogurt, sauerkraut, miso, tempeh, kefir, kimchi, sourdough bread, and fermented vegetables in a water brine.
- Avoid artificial sweeteners, high amounts of added sugars and highly processed foods. Studies have shown that artificial sweeteners negatively affect the microbiota and, in turn, work against healthy blood sugar levels.

By eating a diverse range of foods, and maintaining the balance of your gut microbiota, you can realize long-lasting health impacts. Having a healthy gut will improve digestion and absorption of nutrients, boost your immune system, and help protect against chronic diseases like cancer, obesity, and cardiovascular disease.

Frozen Yogurt Bites

Makes 12 Servings

Ingredients:

- ½ cup granola (choose one with less than 6 grams of sugar per serving)
- ¼ cup sliced almonds
- 1 ½ cups nonfat vanilla Greek yogurt
- ½ cup fresh fruit, diced

Topping:

- ¾ cup fresh fruit, diced
- ¼ cup granola
- 2 tablespoons sliced almonds



Directions:

1. Wash hands with soap and water.
2. Wash fruit by gently rubbing under cold running water and dice.
3. Line a 12-cup muffin pan with muffin liners.
4. Mix ½ cup granola and ¼ cup sliced almonds together in a small bowl. Sprinkle about 2 teaspoons of granola/almond mixture into the bottom of each cup. Set aside.
5. In a medium bowl, add yogurt and fresh fruit. Using a fork, mash fruits into yogurt, until mostly mixed in with a few chunks remaining. Stir and fold until well blended.
6. Spoon fruit/yogurt mixture, divided evenly, into each cup. Tap the pan to smooth out each layer.
7. Press about 1 tablespoon of fresh fruit into the tops of each cup.
8. Combine remaining granola and almonds; sprinkle over the fruit.
9. Place pan into freezer and chill until firm.
10. Pop out each cup and enjoy. (Allow the cups to thaw slightly before consuming.)

Nutrition Information per serving: 69 calories; 3 g total fat (.2 g saturated fat, 0 g trans fat); 7 g carbohydrates; 3 g sugar; 5 g protein; 1.3 g fiber; 23 mg sodium.