Ask The Expert

8 Tips to Improve Your Gut-Brain Connection

If you've heard the sayings "go with your gut" or "butterflies in your stomach," you get the gist that your thoughts and feelings can affect your gut. And likewise, your gut symptoms can impact your mood. This is due to nerve pathways that connect the brain to the gut that act like a superhighway delivering communication in both directions. This is the gut-brain connection!

Try these 8 tips to strengthen your gut-brain connection.

1 4-square Breathing



Breathing is one of the most convenient and effective ways to slow down your stress response and allow your body to relax, heal, and digest. The 4-square breathing technique is something that you can do anytime, anywhere! It's simple:

- breathe in through the nose for a count of 4,
- hold your breath for a count of 4,
- exhale through the nose or mouth for a count of 4, and
- pause for a count of 4 before breathing in again.

Check out this article if you would like a guided version of this exercise.

2 Mindful Eating

Did you know that digestion starts in the brain? As you look at, smell, and anticipate your first bite, your brain sends messages to your gut that food is coming. HOW you eat can play a significant role in how your gut processes and digests food. Slowing down and mindfully eating improves certain GI symptoms like gas, bloating, and abdominal pain! As you slow down to eat you'll be in the present moment and tap into your body and the messages it's sending. Look at this checklist for more ideas on incorporating mindful eating into your routine.

3 Gratitude

One way to figure out the joyful components of your life is through practicing gratitude. To cultivate gratitude, intentionally shift your focus to the things you're thankful for. Research shows that people who practiced gratitude reported fewer physical symptoms, felt better about their lives, and were more optimistic about life. You can harness gratitude and positivity by keeping a gratitude journal, sending thank-you notes, or engaging in spiritual practices like praying.



4 Yoga

Many have heard that yoga is a great activity that supports overall physical and mental well-being. However, did you know that certain poses can also help digestive functions and decrease GI symptoms? Poses like wind relieving pose, seated twist, happy baby, and child's pose are great ways to help calm and massage the digestive tract and bring relaxation to your day. Curious to learn how to do these poses? Check out this article on Yoga for Digestive Health!

5 Body Anchoring Meditation

Pick one body part and feel all of the sensations in that body part. Can you feel a buzzing or tingling sensation? Take note of the temperature of your skin here. Is it cool or warm? How does it feel to add a tiny bit of movement to that body part? Allow these sensations to act as an anchor, keeping you in the present moment. Check out this article on Calmness in the Palm of Your Hand.

6 5-4-3-2-1 Game

Play this game anytime you need a reset or feel too scattered or restless to choose one focal point. Find:

- 5 things you can see,
- 4 things you can touch or feel with your body,
- 3 things you can hear,
- 2 things you can smell,
- lastly, name 1 good thing about yourself.



7 Find Opportunities for Joy

Make time to feel joy! Humans are hard-wired to look for danger. This is called a negativity bias. As you seek out opportunities to add pleasure to your life, you're rewiring your brain to notice the positives.

- Consider a hobby, like painting or crocheting.
- Take an evening walk with your dog.
- Play your favorite game, dance to your favorite music, or call one of your friends.

Consistently doing the small things that bring happiness improves well-being and overall quality of life.

8 Coach-led Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (CBT)

CBT is based on the concept that how we think, feel, and behave all interact together. Researchers report you may have fifty to seventy thousand thoughts in one day! Most of our thoughts are automatic.

They happen quickly and are just outside of our awareness. It isn't possible (or even helpful) to analyze each and every thought. However, it is important to start recognizing when you have especially unhelpful thoughts or unhelpful patterns of thinking. In CBT, these unhealthy ways of thinking are called "Cognitive Distortions." This means we believe something false. We all do it. We're just not always aware of it. Connect with your Health Coach to get started on this path!

