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The gut-brain connection: How what we eat affects our mental health?



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Statement of the Problem: Mental health disorders are on the rise, from ADHD and anxiety to depression and dementia, the number of people who are suffering from the mental health issues is at an all-time high. In 2001, the World Health Organization predicted that one out of four people would be affected by a mental disorder at some point in their life. Today, antidepressants are some of the most popular drugs in the United States, and their usage shows no signs of waning. In Germany, antidepressant use has risen 46% in just four years. In Spain and Portugal, it rose about 20% during the same period.

Methodology & Theoretical Orientation: An inter subjective experiment instructing subjects to eliminate sugar and all processed foods, to eat a whole foods diet high in antioxidants and healthy fats over a period of three months. The subjects were also instructed to incorporate daily movement and to start practicing meditation as a form of relaxation and to reduce stress.

Findings: The subjects of the study reported an elevated mood within a few days to a couple of weeks. They also reported higher energy levels, better productivity, less brain fog and higher resistance to stress. Other results included better digestion, less bloating and weight loss between 1 to 6 kgs in the first four weeks. One subject was on mood stabilizing medication at the beginning of the study and was gradually coming off it with the assistance of her psychiatrist at the end. She had been on medication for 10 years.

Conclusion & Significance: Our mental health is affected by our diet and more and more scientific evidence is emerging to confirm this. Stress and what we eat can alter the composition and products of the gut flora. Subjects who are transferred from a traditional Western diet that is high in trans-fat, additives and carbohydrates to a diet that is high in antioxidants, fibre and healthy fats change the composition of the microbiota and as a result, their mental health improves.

Biography

Madeleine Karlsson has completed her studies in Institute for Integrative Nutrition and is a certified Holistic Health and Nutrition Coach. In her work, she helps her clients mend their relationship with food, improve their physical and mental health; and optimize their weight by teaching how to eat intuitively. She is also an International Speaker, Corporate Consultant and Natural Food Chef.

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