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## **Gut health and brain function – what is the link?**

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Mental health conditions are on the rise, with a 13% increase in mood disorders and substance use in the last decade. The most common mental health conditions, depression and anxiety, costs the global economy an estimated \$1 trillion each year.

While effective nutritional and herbal therapeutics to help manage stress and mood disorders are widely available, data emerge to indicate that gut health also plays a significant role; the gut-brain-microbiota (GBM) axis has shone a light on the connection with brain function.

The gut, microbiome and brain are closely connected. They communicate with each other via the gut-brain axis (GBA), a bidirectional link between the central nervous system and the enteric (gut) nervous system of the body.

The GBA involves complex crosstalk with the brain

continuously sending messages to the gut and vice versa, linking the emotional and cognitive centres of the brain with intestinal peripheral functions.

This interaction plays a significant role in gastrointestinal and mental health and changes in the GBA, contributed by stress or poor microbial function, can lead to leaky gut, irritable bowel syndrome, celiac disease, colitis, neurodegenerative and psychiatric disorders. Up to 40% of IBS patients will experience depression, anxiety, and mood disturbances, in addition to abdominal pain, bloating, and abnormal bowel movements.

Modulating the gut-brain interface is a safe and effective consideration for patients with mood disorders, such as depression and anxiety. Herbal and nutritional medicine combined with dietary and lifestyle interventions has proven to effectively support symptom management and resolution.

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