Anxiety Could Be Treated in the Gut, Says Observational Study

A recent observational study published in the journal General Psychiatry found that regulating the gut microbiome had positive effects on people with anxiety. In a review of 21 different studies that included controlled anxiety tests, 11 studies showed that regulating the intestinal microbiome produced positive results. The researchers conclude:

> *We find that more than half of the studies included showed it was positive to treat anxiety symptoms by regulation of intestinal microbiota. There are two kinds of interventions (probiotic and non-probiotic interventions) to regulate intestinal microbiota, and it should be highlighted that the non-probiotic interventions were more effective than the probiotic interventions. More studies are needed to clarify this conclusion since we still cannot run meta-analysis so far."*

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Managing the Gut

After looking at 21 studies and the 1,503 people those studies consisted of, researchers found that regulating intestinal flora was a beneficial action 52 percent of the time. But what did their interventions look like and can that be applied in real life?

The interventions in the study were mostly divided into two different categories, probiotic and non-probiotic. The non-probiotic options consisted of regulating diet, like choosing a low FODMAP diet or using prebiotics like

fructooligosaccharides or trans-galactooligosaccharides. Of the 11 studies that showed the positive effects of microbiome regulation on anxiety, 5 used probiotics and 6 relied on non-probiotic options, including diet.

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Mood and the Gut

Diet has a powerful effect on our microbiome, and that microbiome in turn greatly affects mood. Many of the hormones responsible for regulating our attitudes are produced in the intestinal tract, like serotonin. There is direct communication between our gut and our brain chemicals, and an unbalanced, unhealthy gut will correlate with mood shifts and fluctuations.

Non-probiotic interventions were the most effective method of anxiety treatment which includes the use of prebiotics. Prebiotics stimulate the growth of beneficial bacteria like Lactobacillus and bifidobacteria. These bacteria can be found in probiotics, but prebiotics work because they feed the bacteria and create an atmosphere where it can thrive. Because they are a type of fiber, prebiotics are also easy and inexpensive to obtain. Many foods are an excellent source of them, from raw vegetables and fruits (especially dandelion greens, onions, garlic, bananas, apples, and asparagus) to pulses like chickpeas, lentils, and kidney beans.

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A Holistic View

The gut has been called the "second brain" by many scientists and using that connections to treat mental disorders like anxiety is (pardon me…) a no-brainer. One of the benefits of

the increased availability and advancements of research in the way we work is how it allows us to see how truly holistic our body is. Everything is connected, and that process starts in the gut. A healthy, thriving gut goes a long way in improving the health of the other systems in our body.

Sources:

- *Anxiety Might Be Alleviated By Regulating Gut Bacteria* – BMJ
- *Effects of regulating intestinal microbiota on anxiety symptoms: A systematic review* – BMJ General Psychiatry
- *How Candida Leads to Depression, Anxiety, ADHD, and Other Mental Disorders* – Organic Lifestyle Magazine
- *Think Twice: How the Gut's "Second Brain" Influences Mood and Well-Being* – Scientific American
- *Probiotics and Prebiotics: What's the Difference?* – Healthline