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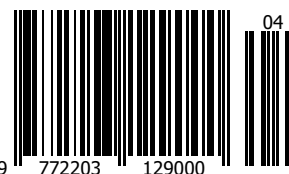
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# Gut health and smart decision-making

When you make a call on a decision, choosing to “go with your gut”, it’s likely you’re getting signals from your second brain – the one that’s hidden in the digestive system. By Jo Formosa.

**T**he gut does more than just break down food, absorb nutrients and expel waste. It’s a mass of neural tissues and important neurotransmitters, responsible for everything from determining mental health, immunity, weight gain, mood and so much more.

Some 80 per cent of the traffic along the vagus nerve is sensory information sent up to the brain by the body, rather than vice versa and the humble gut has the highest concentration of mood-altering transmitters than anywhere else in the body.

If your gut isn’t functioning properly you won’t be operating at your peak – not by a long shot. It’s not more time in the day, stronger willpower or more sleep that will do the trick either. To increase success, what you need is a smarter gut.

Just look at weight gain as an example of how this works. When you bring the enteric nervous system (or the brain in your gut) in line, so it controls your food choices, it will make the right decisions. For example it will override sweet or high-carb food addictions initiated by bacteria in your gut. By fixing the digestive system, cultivating a gut environment that allows good



bacteria to flourish, improving nutrient absorption and reversing the brain’s neuro-adaptation to toxic or unhealthy foods, the enteric nervous system can heal and start functioning how it should.

As your gut becomes more intelligent, its communication with your brain becomes stronger and clearer. Then your conscious mind will begin to remember, and intuitively know, which foods are good for you, and which aren’t. Meanwhile the enteric nervous system begins to reassert its

control and your body will respond appropriately when you fuel it with the wrong things. You might feel tired after a meal, bloated or even sick as your body will be rejecting the foods that aren’t beneficial for optimal functioning.

If the gut isn’t working properly, this doesn’t only mean poor nutrient absorption, weight gain and a weakened immunity, it affects everything from sleep patterns and mood, to the ability to shut off and make smart decisions.

When you’re not feeling as sharp as you once did, and decision-



mood) produced in the digestive tract, it's little wonder that antidepressant meds, meant to cause chemical changes in the mind, can provoke GI issues as a side effect.

Irritable Bowel Syndrome (IBS), which now affects more than one in seven Australians, has been linked to serotonin in our digestive system. Symptoms include abdominal cramping and pain, bloating and gas, diarrhoea and constipation - with flare-ups stretching days, weeks or months. Constipation tends to mean lower levels of serotonin, whereas people with diarrhoea like symptoms are more likely to have high levels of serotonin. Changes in your serotonin level affect your gut as well as your brain.

A new study published in the journal PLOS Biology backed up what has been known in Ayurveda for thousands of years - it shows how our gut bacteria communicates with our brains to change our food choices.

Specifically, the researchers from Monash University and Champalimaud Centre in Portugal found that when lacking in certain nutrients, animals would later choose foods high in those nutrients. They also found that the right balance of bacteria in their gut could tide them over when they were deficient, suppressing those cravings.

As I tell many of my clients, digestive problems arise when we don't listen to how our body is feeling. Eating too much, or eating the foods that aren't suited to your body type, will dampen your digestive fire. You want to be doing the opposite. **BFM**

*Clinical director of Back to Health, Jo Formosa specialises in Ayurveda and neuro strategies. Along with a team of highly qualified Ayurvedic Dr and Practitioners, she offers a number of modalities to achieve optimal health in high-pressure environment. Together with internationally-acclaimed wealth expert Roger Hamilton, she has created Health Dynamics - the world's first health and personality test. To find out where you are on the health spectrum and enhance the gut-brain connection, visit <http://healthspectrumtest.com>*

making needs a tune up, it might be time to look at improving gut health. Here are some tips to get you started:

- **Diet:** The food that you eat has a major impact on the overall health of your gut. Go for alkaline foods like bone broth, lentils and steamed vegetables; if you want meat, it's better to choose white meat over red meat. Also steer clear of highly processed foods, frozen foods, cold drinks and too many sweets.
- **Listen to your body:** If things aren't quite right, you feel low

on energy after an early morning meal or a heavy lunch - the key here is to listen to your body's intelligence, there's nothing wrong with skipping breakfast if you don't feel like eating in the morning.

- **Lay off the stimulants:** Three coffees in the afternoon might charge you with the buzz to get through the day, but in excess it's aggravating cortisol levels and not helping the gut flora.

With more than 95 per cent of the body's serotonin (or happy chemical which controls your

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