



Day 3: Exercise, The Gut and Your Brain

When it comes to our health, the one thing that has been shown over and over again in dozens of studies to be beneficial, is exercise.

Your gut bugs like you moving and studies have shown that working out increases the populations of beneficial bacteria in your gastrointestinal tract by up to 40% .

But how does it help the gut?

1. An anti-inflammatory effect

When researchers have looked at populations over time, low physical activity was associated with inflammatory bowel disease (IBD). The more active people were, the less likely they were to develop IBD over the course of their life. That's an association and it doesn't prove a causal relationship, but other studies also showed benefits for with exercise.

2. Helps preserve the diversity of the gut microbiome

In general, exercise increases your microbial diversity. Exercise has been shown to increase the amount of short chain fatty acids, specifically butyrate, produced by bacteria and the types of bacteria correlated to muscle.

Adequate production of butyrate is crucial for a healthy gut and it may also decrease inflammation....BUT it really depends on what type of exercise and the intensity.

What we do know is that certain beneficial bacteria were increased with exercise, and more gut diversity means more protection against obesity, one of the major risk factors for dementia.

3. Better digestion thanks to movement

Aside from your microbes, exercise also helps with keeping your gut moving. Drinking lots of water is essential as well.

And exercising outside in nature is a great way to expose yourself to even more different types of bacteria.

4. In addition to gut health benefits, exercise is essential for a healthy brain.

More movement, more blood flow to the brain.

But it really needs to be something you love, and something that gets your heart pumping.

Don't Stress about Exercise!

Stressing about how much or what kind of exercise is not helpful, because that disrupts the microbiome as much, if not more, than inflammatory foods.

The truth is, there isn't enough research to say what type of exercise is the best. Most of the research points to cardio being beneficial for your gut microbes but that isn't to say strength training isn't as important, it is just that the information is lacking.

Do whatever exercise you love, because then you will do it.

What's Your Favorite Way to Move?

Getting exercise does not mean you have to join a gym or buy special workout clothes. Low to moderate intensity workouts contribute to a diverse and healthy microbiome, so even by incorporating movement into the day is helpful. Use the stairs. Sweep the floor, vacuum, dust; housework has actually been connected to a better brain. Park far away from your office or the store.

Exercise can be as simple as going for a good walk to get your heart pumping. (Pretend you're late for a meeting.)

Play table tennis, swim, play tennis or squash. Whatever your level of physical fitness allows. It shouldn't be something you have to force yourself to do, though. It is less beneficial (and maybe even harmful) that way.

Or how about dancing? Dancing is literally one of the best forms of exercise because not only does it get you moving, you are also (generally) dancing with other people. And that fulfills the all-important social aspect of maintaining a healthier brain.

Don't Over-Exercise!

No matter what form of exercise, if you are working too hard without enough rest, it is going to cause your body stress and if that continues for a prolonged period of time, this can have a negative effect on your gut.

Intense exercise such as long-distance running or even high-intensity interval training can, for some, increase intestinal permeability. So, avoid or reduce strenuous workouts and long durations of aerobic activity so you don't stress the gut more.

Exercise is good for your gut, not too hard, not too little and with just enough rest. Variety is key.

Today's Extra Resource: Great article on Dancing and the gut
<https://thegutstuff.com/why-dancing-is-so-gut-for-you/>

Today's Assignment:

Choose an exercise that you like and commit to doing it every day for the remainder of this event. Today is day 3 – write in your journal what you can do for the next 12 days and stick to it. 20 minutes every day is great, but whatever you can fit in – do it.