



How Stress Impacts Gut Health—and What to Do About It

Whether it's stress induced by work, family, friends, the news, or another trigger, it's safe to say that when we feel mentally and emotionally stressed, it's common to feel some effect in our bodies, too. Some of us end up with headaches, others with fatigue, some with pain. And one of the most tangible effects is disruption to your gut.



What's going on in your gut

The phrase "butterflies in your stomach"? That's no coincidence. Your brain and gut are tightly connected, a relationship often called the "brain-gut axis." In fact, the gut has been deemed "second brain," ruled by its own set of neurotransmitters that make up the [enteric nervous system](#) and whose main function is to regulate digestion.

Biologically, mast cells (a type of immune cell) translate stress signals, which then unleash various neurotransmitters and proinflammatory cytokines, or small proteins. There are other players involved as well, including the [vagus nerve](#), gut hormones, tryptophan metabolism, and microbial metabolites like short chain fatty acids.

Some [research](#) even shows that things work the other way around—that gut issues like IBS and diarrhea can actually send a signal to your brain that sparks feelings of anxiety or depression.

How you feel stress in your gut

The physical [effects](#) can be fairly swift, including abdominal pain, bloat, gastroesophageal reflux (acid reflux), and gastrointestinal motility (how quickly, or not, food moves through your body). For people with existing IBD and IBS, stress can exacerbate symptoms.

Ways to manage stress and alleviate gut issues

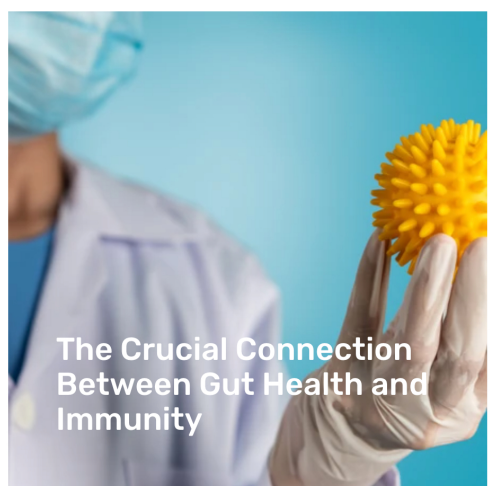
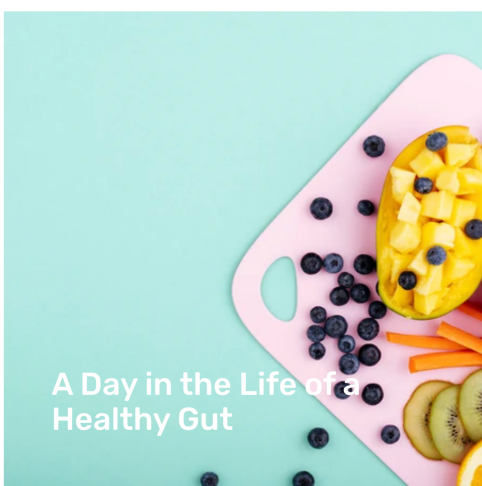
1. **Take probiotics:** Studies have shown that probiotics can ease stress-related GI disorders and positively influence the brain-gut communication system. At Routine, we also include



- ashwagandha, a thoroughly studied herb that's been proven to fight stress and anxiety.
- 2. **Meditate:** Whether you practice 10 minutes once a week or 1 hour every day, meditation has been proven to modify the stress response, which can lower inflammation and maintain an optimal gut-barrier function.
- 3. **Exercise:** It's not just about a good sweat. Moving your body can release feel-good endorphins that alleviate stress, positively shift your **microbiome**, and help in shedding weight.
- 4. **Watch what you eat:** Certain diets have been praised as beneficial to the gut microbiome, especially the plant-heavy, fiber-rich, and antioxidant-packed Mediterranean diet, which has been **shown** to increase *Bifidobacteria*, *Lactobacilli*, *Prevotella*, and other bacteria while also **countering the effects of stress**.

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