

Gut Health & Behavior

A P A R E N T H A N D O U T F R O M L E O M A W E L L N E S S



The Gut–Brain Conversation

The gut and brain are connected by the vagus nerve, creating a two-way communication highway. What happens in the gut directly impacts brain function, and vice versa.

Note: A healthy gut supports a healthy brain. Focus on gentle, long-term changes.

Mood Messengers Begin in the Gut

Neurotransmitters like serotonin (mood regulation) are primarily produced in the gut. A balanced gut microbiome can contribute to emotional stability.

Note: Support your child's gut by incorporating diverse, whole foods.

Blood Sugar & Behavior

Unstable blood sugar levels can lead to mood swings, irritability, and difficulty concentrating. Emphasize whole, unprocessed foods to regulate blood sugar.

Note: Opt for complex carbohydrates and protein at meals to avoid sugar crashes.

Hydration Supports Emotional Regulation

Dehydration can negatively impact mood and cognitive function. Ensure your child drinks enough water throughout the day.

Note: Encourage water intake by offering it consistently and making it readily available.

Fiber Feeds the Gut

Fiber-rich foods nourish beneficial gut bacteria, promoting a healthy gut microbiome. Include fruits, vegetables, and whole grains in your child's diet.

Note: Gradually increase fiber intake to avoid digestive discomfort.

Fiber-Rich Foods

- Apples
- Berries
- Broccoli
- Oats

Gut-Friendly Snacks

- Yogurt (low sugar)
- Fermented foods
- Nuts & seeds

The Power of Routine

Regular mealtimes and consistent sleep schedules support gut health and overall well-being. Predictability reduces stress, positively impacting the gut-brain axis.

Note: Establish a predictable daily rhythm that includes regular mealtimes and bedtime.

Slow, Calm Mealtimes

Encourage mindful eating in a relaxed environment. Rushing meals can impair digestion and increase stress. Remove distractions and focus on enjoying the food.

Note: Create a calm and positive atmosphere during mealtimes.

Stress Affects the Gut

Stress can disrupt the gut microbiome and contribute to digestive issues. Support your child's emotional well-being through mindfulness, play, and open communication.

Note: Identify and address stressors in your child's environment.

Sleep, the Gut & Mood

Adequate sleep is crucial for both gut health and mood regulation. Sleep deprivation can negatively impact the gut microbiome and increase irritability. Aim for consistent bedtime and wake-up times.

Note: Prioritize a relaxing bedtime routine to promote restful sleep.

Summary

This handout covered the important relationship between gut health and behavior in children. By focusing on diet, hydration, routine, and stress management, parents can positively influence their child's gut health and overall well-being. Remember that small, consistent changes can lead to significant improvements. Consult with a healthcare professional for personalized advice.