

Why Is Gut Health And Hydration Important?

*Ask yourself this question..
How important is the spinal
cord to us?
If you answered with the
word 'very' you would be
correct.*

*Dom Haigh, We Are
Wellbeing's new consultant,
outlines the importance of
maintaining a healthy gut
and how certain foods can
quickly affect our mood.*



DOM HAIGH
WE ARE WELLBEING

Keeping Your Second Brain Healthy

There are around 69 million neurons in the spinal cord which is the highway of communication between the body and brain. The spinal cord and brain are commonly known as our Central Nervous System (CNS) and controls most of the functions of the mind and body.

But, did you know that we have a second brain?

That second brain is our gut, also known as the Enteric Nervous System (ENS). – Remembering the spinal cord has 69 million neurons at work, well the gut has around 500 million, so it makes sense to treat our gut with as much care as other incredibly important parts of our body.

The ENS forms part of the gut-brain axis and the communication between these two is very important for how we feel day to day. We produce and secrete the majority of our serotonin in the gut, whilst the gut also produces another neurotransmitter called GABA, which aids in the control of feelings of fear and anxiety.

So What Role Does Nutrition Play?

Well creating and harboring a harmonious environment in the gut is crucial to keep the gut-brain axis healthy and working for us rather than against us.

We look after our gut health by feeding it what it needs to thrive, namely plenty of wholesome and nutrient dense food.

Some examples include:

- Omega 3 Fats
 - We get these from oily fish such as salmon, mackerel and trout. They are known as essential fatty acids as we have to get them from the food we consume

- Foods high in fibre
- Wholegrain foods, seeds, vegetables and fruits are all high in fibre. Fibre is needed for good digestive health, so that we can eliminate waste efficiently. Gut microbes produce short chain fatty acids (SCFA) which impact brain function and these are produced through the fibre that we consume
- Fermented foods
- Kimchi, kefir and sauerkraut provide good forms of bacteria
- Tryptophan containing foods
- Tryptophan is an amino acid that makes up protein and is converted into serotonin. Turkey and milk are two foods high in this amino acid
- Foods high in polyphenols
- Polyphenols are compounds found in many plant based foods such as fruits, vegetables, wholegrains and extra virgin olive oil

Why Is Staying Hydrated Important?

Hydration is also very important when it comes to the health of our gut. The human body is made up of a large percentage of water and being properly hydrated is important for many processes to occur such as:

- The blood system carrying glucose, oxygen and nutrients to our cells
- The kidneys getting rid of waste products

It also keeps our joints lubricated, maintains the health of our skin and aids the digestive system. Even slight dehydration (1-3%) can have an impact on energy levels, our cognitive ability, concentration and exercise performance.

How Much Water Do We Need?

How much water you need depends on various factors such as:

- Age
 - Your body stores less water as you age so it's important to keep it topped up
- Activity levels
 - The more active you are the more you will sweat, therefore the need to replenish that will be greater
- Climate
 - Hotter climates mean more sweating, which means you need to drink more
- Pregnant or breastfeeding
 - More water will be needed to avoid developing constipation

For most, the absolute minimum should be around to aim for 2 litres per day; for many, this won't be enough and hence should be aiming for around 2.5-3 litres per day.

You can tell if you are dehydrated by looking at the colour of your urine, if it is a clear or a pale straw colour then you are doing well. If it is more yellow or a stronger yellow, then you should reach for that water bottle.

Thank you Dom for highlighting the importance of keeping on top of our gut health and water levels. March is national nutrition month and, from us at We Are Wellbeing, we urge our readers to focus especially on their intake this month.

