

# It Takes Guts to Live a Healthy Life

What does it mean to “have guts?” Don’t we all have them? Are we talking about extreme sports enthusiasts, some strange source of internal power, people who reconnect with estranged family members, or those going on a job interview? Yes. It turns out that any experience that evokes any amount or any kind of emotion takes guts—and brains!

The brain communicates with the gastrointestinal system to start working before you even put food in your mouth, and the “gastro” system immediately shoots signals to the brain every time it’s upset. Consider the expressions: butterflies in the stomach, gut-wrenching experience, or spilling your guts out. These aren’t just abstract symbols or silly word-plays.

Your brain produces direct gut symptoms every time you experience anxiety, depression, stress, anger, and even minimal frustration. At the same time, stomach pains and internal gut issues can produce symptoms of anxiety, stress, anger, etc. that go straight to the brain. This brain-gut relationship is completely **interconnected**, powerful, and super sensitive. Plus, the gut is lined by such a vast system of millions of nerve cells that it’s often referred to as the second brain!

Long periods of stress or other challenging emotions can literally change the healthy movements and physiology of the gastro system. Even the handy-dandy little mood-altering neurotransmitters called serotonin are primarily located in the gut. When those and other neurotransmitters aren’t communicating clearly, they can effect the immune system, cause **functional GI disorders** like Irritable Bowel Syndrome, and lead to depression and other psychological disorders. Recent “**neurogastroenterology**” scientific research has even

linked “second brain” problems to osteoporosis.

Maintaining a healthy gut-brain connection includes recognizing when your mind is talking to you through your body. Heartburn, lack of sleep, difficulty concentrating, and constipation are all signs of gut-brain imbalances. Understanding what lowers self-confidence, causes negative thought patterns, evokes stress, and produces states of non-acceptance, as well as having good coping mechanisms for dealing with stressors is key to balancing the gut-brain connection.

Mindful breathing, relaxation, meditation, moderate exercise, eating natural foods, and practicing cognitive behavioral techniques (like positive thinking) are all excellent ways to cope with stress and create healthy gut-brain activity. Just because you feel discomfort in your stomach or anxiety over something doesn't mean you should avoid it—because repression causes guts-brain imbalances too!

It takes guts to think differently, try something new, and put yourself out there for new experiences. When you feel that rise in your stomach, nauseous excitement, or an urge to let everything go, follow your guts—and then relax! Think of it as pushing through and not “catastrophizing” just because you feel a little emotional discomfort. When heightened states of being are greeted with satisfaction and pleasurable serotonin emissions, your guts re-balance quickly.

With psychology and physiology and all of the -ologies in-between, by the time scientists uncover most of the intricate details of the gut-brain connection, they might just find that love, acceptance, and gratitude are the cure-alls. From swimming in the ocean and listening to music to sharing good times with New Bedford friends and family, your guts just know when you're feeling good: it's your job have enough guts to make them feel good!

