

The Gut-Feelings Connection

A Guide to Rebalancing Your Mood + Gut Health

Dr. Will Cole, IFMCP, DNM, DC



What is the Mind-Body Connection?

While it might sound a little “far-out” for some, the mind-body connection is ultimately the idea that your thoughts and feelings can control certain aspects of your physiology and that your physiology can also play a role in the state of your mental health. There is no greater example of this than the gut-brain axis.

The Gut-Brain Axis

Science often refers to your gut as your “second brain.” In fact, your gut and brain are actually formed from the same fetal tissue when you were growing in your mother’s womb, and continue their special bond throughout your whole life through what is known as the gut-brain axis.

Occludin and zonulin are two proteins that govern gut permeability as well as the permeability of your blood-brain barrier. Elevated antibodies to these proteins can indicate that there has been damage to your gut and your brain leading to inflammation in both areas. This clearly shows us that whatever impacts one, impacts the other.

Is Shameflammation Sabotaging Your Health?

Shameflammation is a two-fold problem with shame on one end and inflammation on the other, both deeply affecting one another. When it comes to shame, this emotion can leave us feeling overwhelmed, anxious, hopeless, aimless, and totally disconnected from our intuition. Not only can it be both the underlying cause and result of chronic health conditions—it’s often the one thing standing between us and optimal health.

And then, there’s inflammation. In our modern world, inflammation has become chronic due to poor diets, toxin exposure, and emotions like chronic shame, stress, and unresolved trauma. Not only is stress, trauma, and shame a major trigger for inflammation, inflammation itself can further perpetuate mental health problems like brain fog, depression, and anxiety.

This constant loop leaves us at a loss for how to tackle our physical and emotional health.

Signs You Might Be Experiencing Shameflammation

Because your physical health impacts your mental health just as much as the mental impacts your physical, I always look for the following physical AND emotional signs to better determine if shameflammation is a part of your health case.

- Unexplained chronic pain
- Hormone imbalances
- Brain fog
- A disconnection from your intuition—especially with food and wellness
- Autoimmune conditions
- Heart palpitations
- Chronic fatigue
- Digestive distress (persistent constipation, diarrhea, bloating, etc.)
- Insomnia
- Low libido
- Mood swings
- Weight loss resistance
- Sudden weight loss
- Lack of motivation
- Feelings of overwhelm—especially with food and wellness



How To Improve Your Gut-Feelings Connection

As we've learned, we can't address gut health without addressing your feelings, and vice versa. Since the two go hand-in-hand, we must make changes in both areas to see long-term, sustainable healing.

Feelings Practices

1. Mindfulness

One of the biggest ways to restore your gut-feelings connection? Reduce stress. Establishing a regular mindfulness practice like journaling, prayer, or meditation can help you refocus on yourself and the present moment and lower overall stress levels. To elevate your practice, try diffusing calming essential oils or using an essential oil roll-on on your temples, wrists and neck.

2. Self-care

With so much going on in our daily lives, making time for self-care is often the last on our to-do list. However, spending time alone, enjoying your own company away from other people, is an often overlooked way to enhance your mind-body connection. Not only is this time a way to decompress and destress, it can give you an opportunity to clear your head and work through any negative emotions or daily traumas that could be contributing to poor health.

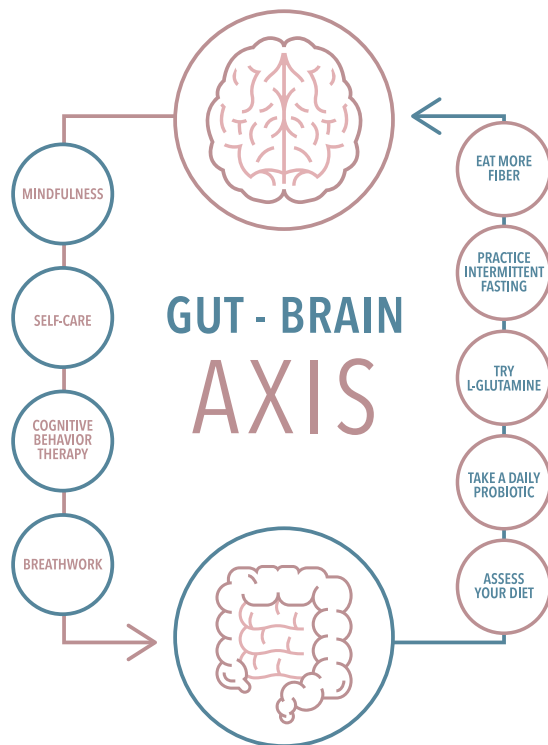
3. Cognitive behavior therapy†

Here's the truth: the mind often forgets things that the body remembers. This is especially true when it comes to past trauma, hurt, or grief. Many of us spend our days distracted by daily tasks, feeling pretty good and moving through life without pausing long enough to feel our feelings or really connect with our deeper emotions.

Cognitive behavior therapy (CBT) was originally developed to treat depression and is still considered one of the most effective types of therapy. The whole idea is to improve negative emotions by changing destructive thoughts and behaviors through developing personal coping strategies for each person. In many cases, it can actually be just as effective as medication!

4. Breathwork†

When you're stressed or anxious, your breathing gets shallower, further perpetuating stress and anxiety. Focused breathwork is a great tool that can be done anywhere, anytime to bring you back to the present moment whenever you feel stress rising up.



Gut Practices

1. Assess your diet

Looking at the physical end of the mind-body connection, the food you eat plays a major role in how you feel. Not only can foods like sugar, alcohol, fat-free foods, and nutrient deficiencies play a role in depression and anxiety, certain foods can help alleviate depression and anxiety symptoms by correcting deficiencies and supporting healthy brain function.

2. Take a daily probiotic

Your microbiome—the collection of bacteria located in your gut— influences all aspects of your health.* It's important that your microbiome has more good bacterial strains than negative to support optimal health.* A probiotic supplement will ensure you are getting a much-needed boost of essential bacteria.*

3. Try L-Glutamine

L-Glutamine is essential for maintaining the health and growth of enterocytes—the cells that line your gut—since it is the preferred fuel source of these cells.* So for both gut health and immune support, L-Glutamine should be a go-to resource in your toolbox*.

4. Practice intermittent fasting

By going extended periods of time without eating, you're able to give your digestion a much-needed break while helping to rebalance your gut microbiome. Check out my 3-Day Intermittent Fasting Starter Guide for how to safely fast while listening to your body's needs.

5. Eat more fiber

Fiber is essential for a healthy gut.* Not only does it help you build up good gut bacteria, it keeps you regular and having healthy, solid bowel movements.* Fiber can be found in vegetables like artichokes, carrots, and broccoli. Fiber is recognized as a nutrient of concern because most people don't eat enough, so supplementing can be a good way to fill the gap.

†CBT and breathwork should be practiced under the supervision of a licensed healthcare professional specializing in these techniques.

*These statements have not been evaluated by the Food and Drug Administration. These products are not intended to diagnose, treat, cure or prevent any disease.

The Takeaway

While we are continuously learning about the mechanisms by which your mental well-being affects your physical health and vice versa, the mind-body connection can't be denied. In order to start healing mentally, emotionally, and physically, we need to start addressing health from a whole-person perspective.

In my book "Gut Feelings," I give you even more targeted holistic tools to help you reevaluate your relationship with food and your body, getting you back in touch with your gut feelings. My 21-Day Gut Feeling plan helps you bridge the gap between your emotions and your health, including:

1. More than fifty healing recipes, such as Breakfast Fried Rice, Scallop Noodle Bowls, and Honey Grapefruit Sorbet
2. Dietary prescriptions founded upon flexibility and awareness
3. Mindfulness techniques to strengthen your intuition and discover your priorities

By approaching nutrition and health from a place of self-love, you can begin to eliminate stubborn health conditions on your own terms.

About Dr. Will Cole

Based in Pittsburgh, Dr. Will Cole, IFMCP, DNM, DC, counsels clients all over the world. His holistic approach to wellness through functional medicine finds the root cause of health problems and tailors a functional approach to the individual. He is the best-selling author of "Ketotarian," "The Inflammation Spectrum," and "Intuitive Fasting." His latest book, "Gut Feelings" (March 21, 2023) offers a definitive guide to understanding the connection between what you eat and how you feel.



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