

Herbs for the Gut-Brain Axis

Many herbs both improve digestive function and balance the nervous system function

The health of the intestinal tract is connected to mental and emotional wellbeing. Imbalances in microflora, intestinal inflammation, or leaky gut can influence one's mood and mental function, causing problems like anxiety, depression, irritability, and brain fog. Conversely, stress, worry, fear, and other forms of chronic emotional distress will cause problems with digestive function, including indigestion, bloating, gas, diarrhea, and constipation.

Fortunately, there are many herbs that work on both the nervous system and the intestinal tract to help balance out both digestive and mental function. Here are some major remedies to consider.

St. John's Wort

Widely recognized as a remedy for mild to moderate depression, St. John's wort is also helpful for nervous system problems such as anxiety and insomnia. It also improves weak and irritable depression. St. John's wort is reported to aid weak gut instincts, and probably helps tone up the vagal (vagus) nerve and the enteric nervous system found in the gut. Recognized as a remedy for improving serotonin levels, it's important to remember that more serotonin is produced by the enteric nervous system than the brain, an important key to understanding St. John's wort's effect on the gut-brain axis.

Chamomile

One of the most popular herbal teas in the world, chamomile is helpful for digestive problems associated with nervousness and irritability. It also appears to regulate the vagus nerve and particularly the solar (or celiac) plexus of that nerve, which is responsible for communications between the guts and the brain. A cup of chamomile tea with dinner can both stimulate digestion and calm the nerves at the same time. Chamomile is particularly helpful for both children and adults who are easily upset over minor irritations.

Peppermint

A popular remedy for easing gas and bloating, a cup of peppermint tea or a drop of peppermint oil will help settle the stomach, help to ease gas and bloating, and ease "brain fog" at the same time. Basically, peppermint helps both the stomach and the brain "digest" things. It's a specific for indigestion brought

on by excessive mental activity. It promotes mental alertness, stimulates digestion, and helps balance the microbiome.

Catnip

A soothing remedy for the stomach and nerves, catnip has long been combined with fennel as a remedy for colic in infants, but catnip is also helpful for adults. Like peppermint, it has effects on both the nerves and digestion. It is particularly helpful for people who hold tension in the stomach or experience intestinal cramps. It's also helpful for acid indigestion and has been dubbed by some herbalists as "nature's alka-seltzer." It's particularly helpful for digestive problems brought on by excessive worry.

Wood Betony

Wood betony is another remedy that helps balance the gut-brain connection, probably through the solar plexus and vagus nerve. It's a remedy that helps people who over think things to listen more to their gut instincts. Wood betony, however, is more specific for nerve related pain.

Dandelion

This common weed is helpful for calming down an irritated digestive system. It helps feed the friendly flora and improve the health of the microbiome because it contains the prebiotic inulin. It is helpful for tall, thin people who have weak digestion due to a hiatal hernia. It also helps relieve brain fog associated with digestive and liver stagnation.

Dill

Most commonly known as a seasoning for pickles, dill is a carminative that can stimulate digestion and ease gas and bloating. It's also helpful for people with a weak solar plexus, who find themselves easily distracted and scattered in their thinking and activities. Being thus over-stimulated and often overwhelmed they suffer from digestive issues.

Selected References

Strategies for Health by Steven Horne

The Earthwise Herbal, Vol I and II, by Matthew Wood

Dorothy Hall's Herbal Medicine by Dorothy Hall

Flower Essence Repertory by Patricia Kamynski and Richard Katz

For Educational Purposes Only

This handout is for educational purposes and should not be used to diagnose or treat diseases. Seek appropriate professional assistance for all health problems. This handout may be reproduced by members of Steven Horne Creation's member program, all other rights reserved.

Copyright ©2025 Steven Horne Creations, LLC (stevenhorne.com)

Distributed by: