

Gut Feelings: The Impact of Probiotics on Mental Health Outcomes

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Past studies on anxiety and depression have focused on genetic, neurological, behavioral and environmental aspects of these diseases (Jiang et al., 2015). Newest research on this topic has shifted towards the impact of the body's own gut microbiome, emphasizing the profound effects that the gut may have on mood and behavior (Foster, Rinaman, Cryan, 2017). The concept of gut-brain communication and interrelationship can be used as a new paradigm to study mental health disorders. An analysis of the literature was completed to answer the question, "What is the effect of probiotic use on mental health outcomes for the adult population in a primary care setting?" Martha Roger's 1990 Science of Unitary Human Beings was used as a framework to conceptualize mental health disorders as disequilibrium of energy and the importance of treating the patient in a holistic manner (Papathanasiou, Sklavou & Kourkouta, 2013). Studies in this systematic literature review implemented several methods to investigate the bidirectional communication and relationship between the brain and gut microbiome. Measures of anxiety, depression, fecal microbiota, cortisol and other signaling molecules were investigated. Synthesis of the literature demonstrated that probiotic supplementation overall improved mental health outcomes. Considering the multitude of different probiotic strains, study lengths and measurement tools utilized, specific probiotics cannot be recommended for treatment of anxiety and depression at this time. This literature review supports and encourages further research into the use of probiotics for treatment of mental health disorders.

Biography

Julie graduated from the University of Maryland with a BS in Psychology and a minor in Spanish. She Jumped right into nursing school at Georgetown in an accelerated BSN track and started her career at MedStar Washington Hospital Center in the Surgical Oncology department. After 3 years, she moved to Labor and Delivery, where she loves the excitement, teamwork and challenging cases as she works towards becoming a Family Nurse Practitioner. She is an active member of a collaborative, interdisciplinary health care team at Washington Hospital Center.

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