

Don't skip this chapter if you want to reach your full health potential.

Your gut health can influence your mental health via the gut-brain axis (as discussed in Chapter 1), but this isn't just a one-way connection. Your mind, your thoughts, and your emotions can also influence your physical and digestive health. If you want to adopt a holistic approach to take your health to the next level, you also need to consider the role of your thoughts. No matter how difficult it is to implement an elimination diet, most people would rather do that and take supplements than look more closely at their self-care and mindset. And conventional allopathic medicine unfortunately doesn't really seem to pay attention to this part of the health equation, despite its vital, undeniable importance.

You don't need to adopt an entirely new, esoteric practice to improve your mind-body connection. You don't need to become a monk either. You don't even need to meditate, I promise. Little things like better managing your stress, taking time for yourself, laughing, reframing your thoughts, and sleeping well can make all the difference in the world.

"There is no question that the things we think have a tremendous effect upon our bodies. If we can change our thinking, the body frequently heals itself."

— C. Everett Koop, M.D.

STRESS AND DIGESTIVE HEALTH

Stress can and will prevent you from progressing on your BYO diet, so don't make the mistake of dismissing its importance. Even if you're doing everything right with your diet, not paying attention to your mental health can be enough to perpetuate your digestive problems and limit your food tolerance.

Stress can be acute (short term) or chronic (long term). It can be emotional or physical. All types of stress can be problematic for your digestive health. Common sources of stress include deadlines, overworking, financial concerns, interpersonal conflicts, and not getting enough sleep or downtime. If you have a type-A personality and are always looking for something to do, you're especially prone to stress. Even positive forms of stress can trigger a stress response in your body. Traveling, beginning a new relationship, getting married, starting a family, or taking up a new job can be equally stressful for your body.

Physical forms of stress can also have negative consequences for your health. Excessive exercise (especially endurance exercise), as well as pain, infection, gastrointestinal problems, or food sensitivities can all compromise your progress. Stimulants like caffeine can also put extra stress on your body.

why is stress so problematic?

Your body has a switch that allows it to work in two different modes: parasympathetic or sympathetic. Your parasympathetic mode should be your default mode. This is the "rest and digest" mode that allows your body to do repair and maintenance work. This mode is also responsible for setting the conditions for healthy digestion. It is only when your parasympathetic mode is activated that you can produce stomach acid, digestive enzymes, and bile to facilitate digestion and help you better absorb the nutrients from your food.