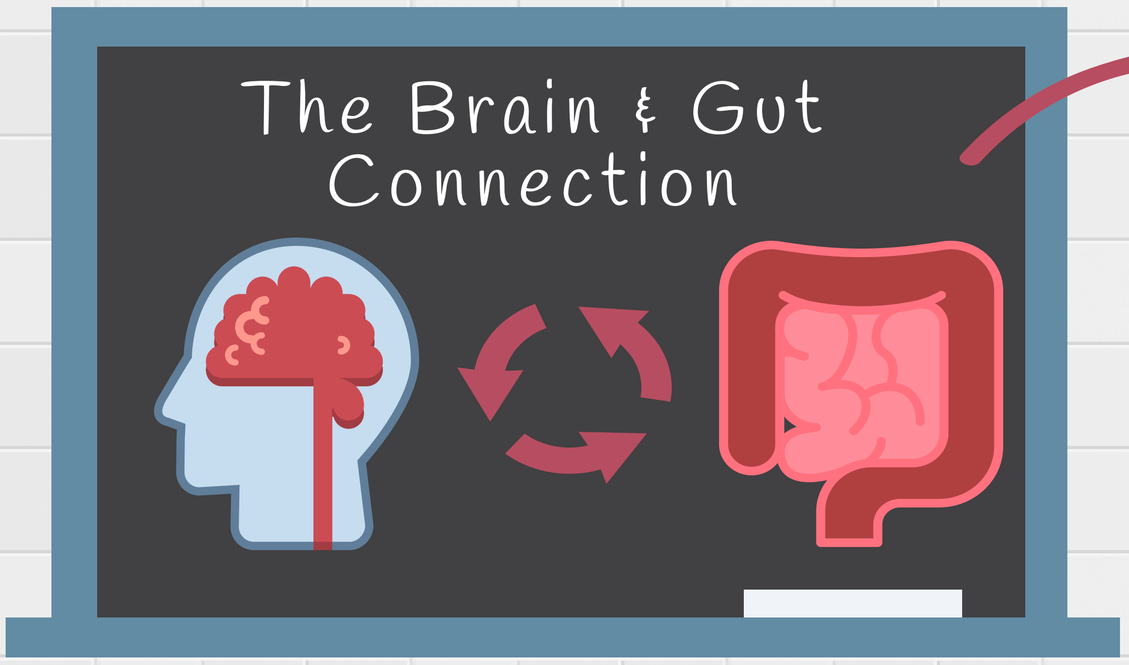
TRUST YOUR GUT

Promoting Good Gastrointestinal (GI) Health

Certain foods, dehydration, medications and stress all can disrupt our digestive health.

With so much that can cause distress to our digestive system, it may feel impossible to try to get back in balance!



Approximately 90% of the body's serotonin* is made in the gastrointestinal tract/gut!

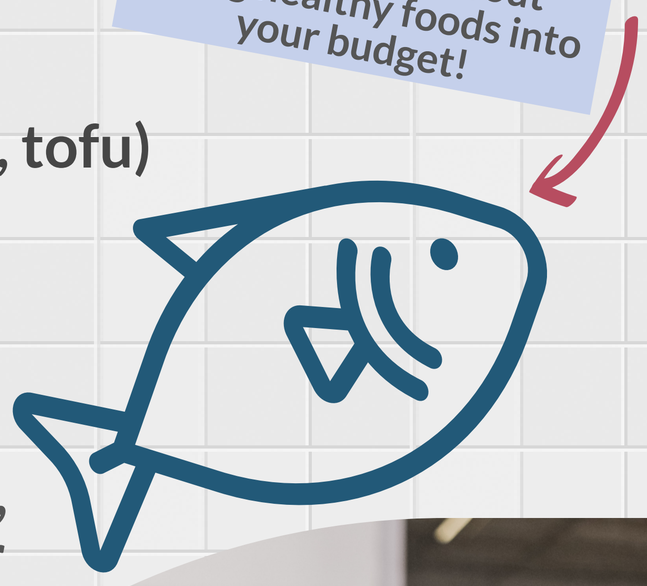
- **Serotonin is a chemical our body makes that helps us feel happier, supports digestion, & prevents blood clotting.*
- Lower levels of serotonin have been linked to diseases like irritable bowel syndrome (IBS), heart diseases, and osteoporosis.

WHAT FOODS SUPPORT GI/GUT HEALTH?

Some foods naturally contain serotonin! Here are some examples of foods that help keep our gut bacteria healthy & help boost serotonin levels in the body:

- **Beans (chickpeas, kidney, pinto & black beans)**
- **Leafy greens (spinach, kale)**
- **Bananas**
- **Turkey**
- **Eggs**
- **Oily, fatty fish (salmon, tuna)**
- **Nuts & seeds (almonds, flaxseed)**
- **Probiotic/fermented foods (yogurt, tofu)**

Click on the fish to view the Health Literacy Center's SNAP Tool to learn more about fitting healthy foods into your budget!



BETTER FOOD CHOICES = BETTER HEALTH

Eating and drinking habits have a huge impact on our overall health, in addition to mood. Overtime, we all have to try harder to keep our GI health in balance. As we age all of these processes become even more challenging for the body to do without help.

Experiencing heartburn, gas, bloating or constipation on a regular basis may lead to other GI problems. The next page has some great tips on lifestyle changes that can help better manage or alleviate some of these GI symptoms.

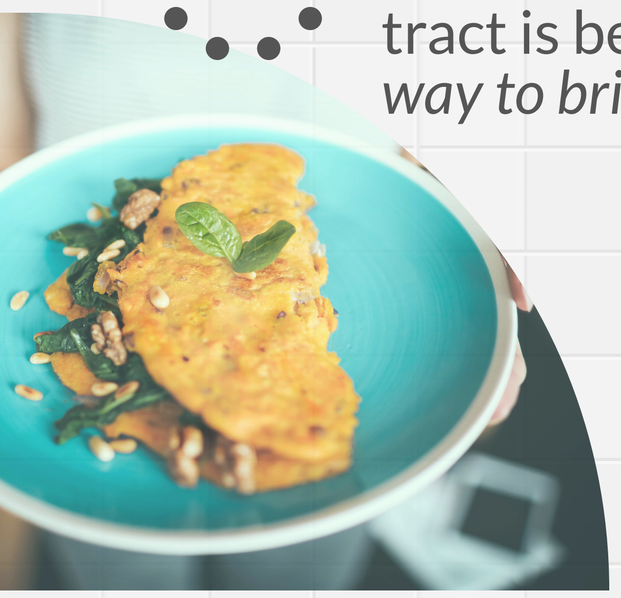
5 WAYS TO IMPROVE GI HEALTH

1 **HYDRATE!** The main cause of chronic constipation is dehydration. Water helps move the food we eat through the body. Without it, stool can become harder to pass!

While 8-10 glasses of water is recommended daily, some of us may need more depending on body size, life style, or other health factors. If drinking water isn't really your thing, try eating it! *Cucumbers, zucchinis and watermelon are all foods with very high water content and can help reduce dehydration.*

2 **EXERCISE!** Lack of physical movement can hurt our digestion. Exercise increases blood flow all over the body which can improve our metabolism and stimulate immune system function.

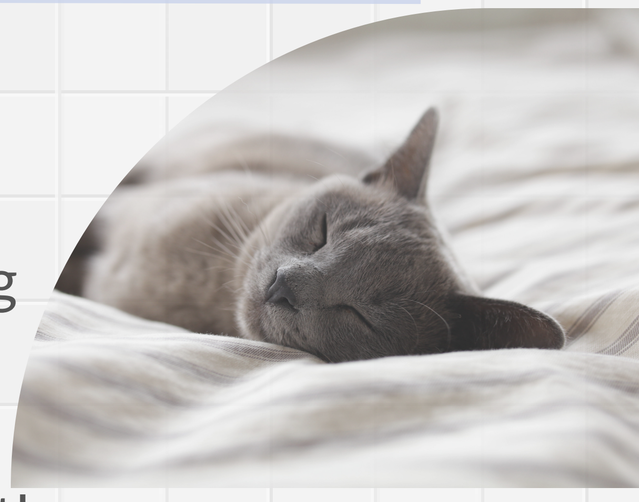
3 **MINDFUL EATING!** Digestion starts in our mouths. Our teeth break down food into smaller pieces so the digestive tract is better able to break it down. *Mindful eating is one way to bring awareness to this process.*



Mindful eating is characterized by:

- Eating more slowly to allow the body to absorb more water, fiber, & nutrients;
- Taking smaller bites;
- Starting each meal with a glass of water; &
- Eating meals at the same time everyday.

4 **SLEEP!** Even while we are sleeping, our digestive system is still working! Eating too close to bedtime does not give the body enough time digest, and we could wake up with heartburn, acid reflux, or other sleep-disrupting symptoms. Try to limit/stop eating during the two hour period before sleep.



5 **AVOID Cigarettes, Alcohol & Caffeine!**
All three of these can interfere with our digestive health.
They can also result in mild to extreme dehydration and lead to problems like stomach ulcers and heartburn.

Listen, we get it, talking about stools and bowel movements isn't for everyone!
But our stool can be a primary indicator of our health.
For a more 'private' approach take a look at the attached graphic for some tips on how to work toward healthy stool!

Thresholds Health Literacy Center

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For more tools check out:
www.thresholds.org/programs-services/research-evaluation/health-literacy-center/

References:

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