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The bacteria in your gut may help you destress, says new research

BY SRAVANTH VERMA JAN 17, 2015 IN HEALTH

A recent study has found a link between the kind of bacteria you have in your gut and your mental anxiety levels. This throws up some interesting questions in the study of anxiety relief.

The study published in the journal **Psychopharmacology** feeding the "good" bacteria in the gut has a positive correlation with anxiety relief.

The researchers used prebiotics to test the hypothesis. Prebiotics are not to be confused with probiotics. Probiotics are the "good" bacteria in our guts that help in digestion and are the subject of many studies indicating that they play a huge role in our physiological health. **Prebiotics** on the other hand are the carbohydrates that serve as food for those bacteria.

For the study, 45 healthy people between 18 and 45 were placed on a prebiotic or placebo course every day for three weeks. At the end of this period, they completed tests for the researchers to assess their emotional states.

Those who received the prebiotic were seen to pay less attention to negative information, and more attention to positive information as compared to those who received the placebo. Prebiotic recipients were also found to have less cortisol in their saliva. Cortisol levels are higher in people under stress.

Dr. Kirsten Tillisch, the study's lead author, said in a statement, "Time and time again, we hear from patients that they never felt depressed or anxious until they started experiencing problems with their gut. Our study shows that the gut-brain connection is a two-way street."

But the research is still only a pilot test, and more work needs to be done to confirm this link. "It's becoming a very interesting question in the field," said Dr. Roger McIntyre, a professor of psychiatry and pharmacology at the

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University of Toronto. "The animal data looks really interesting, and looks very suggestive, but we're still waiting for that convincing human study," McIntyre said.

Current treatments for anxiety include pharmaceuticals, counselling and therapies such as yoga and meditation. "I think pre/probiotics will only be used as 'adjuncts' to conventional treatments, and never as mono-therapies," **Burnet told HuffPost**. "It is likely that these compounds will help to manage mental illness... they may also be used when there are metabolic and/or nutritional complications in mental illness, which may be caused by long-term use of current drugs."

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Bacteria

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