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Acupuncture: An option for adolescents and those with mental health issues

By Leslie Kelly

A child with allergies. An adolescent with eczema. An adult with depression. All of them can be helped with acupuncture.

That's according to local licensed acupuncturists who also have studied Chinese Herbal Medicine. Barclay Calvert, owner of Nourishing Life Acupuncture and Chinese Herbal Medicine, and Sean Guinan, owner of Oak and Well Acupuncture, have experience in pediatric acupuncture and in treating those with mental health concerns.

"Both acupuncture and Traditional Chinese Medicine can be used to help children," Guinan said. "They are largely misunderstood but they are tools in our toolbox and can help children with allergies, asthma, eczema, digestive issues, ADHD, (Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder) and those who are on the Autism spectrum."

Calvert said children in China had been treated with acupuncture for thousands of years. However, it's not as common in the U.S.

"One of the things about treating children is they change so quickly," Calvert said. "They are vibrant and their bodies are healthy so it doesn't take much to make a big difference."

When treating children Calvert uses a Japanese style of acupuncture, which is gentler. Instead of using needles for children, he will often use magnets, pressure points, cupping and massage.

"I do use needles with children, but I never pressure

them. I show them the needles and let them touch them. They see how thin they are."

Guinan uses the term "taps" for the needles.

"Sometimes we just tap the skin with the needle," he said. "And there are non-needle techniques like tuina, a sort of medical massage, and the use of herbal medicine – such things as tinctures and salves."

Shonishi, a pediatric Japanese acupuncture using little metal tools, also can be used to stimulate the body to heal itself, he added.

Guinan said children heal more quickly because they have "less baggage than adults do."

"Especially with infants," he said. "We don't leave the needles in very long. It's just in and out."

Adults who have depression, or PTSD (Post Traumatic Stress Disorder), and anxiety can use acupuncture also, Calvert and Guinan said.

But both agree that mind and body are closely connected and looking at the patient's overall physical health, lifestyle, and the issues that strain the patient's thoughts, is important.

"You have to find out the whole story," Calvert said. "That's needed to determine what's out of balance that's causing the depression."

He has had experience working with an Iraq War veteran who he was treating for back pain, but ultimately the acupuncture treatments helped him with his PTSD.

Guinan said he has seen "really good outcomes" for

patients with depression who use acupuncture and herbal medicine in combination.

"Acupuncture and manipulation of the central nervous system will help people come back into feeling more comfortable in their bodies and gradually will change the symptoms of what we call depression," Guinan said. "The benefits accumulate over time."

Just how much time, how many treatments and how long the treatments are, will depend on the patient and the illness, the experts said.

Needles are generally an inch long and the width of a cat's whisker. They are generally placed into adults about 1 to 3 millimeters. Needles can be left in for any length of time, spanning from 15 minutes to an hour.

Patients often are treated at least twice in private sessions where the acupuncturist can ask health questions and can determine what is causing them pain or discomfort. With acute illnesses, those treatments can last up to a month.

Following that, both clinics offer community sessions where from three to five patients are treated together. They each relax in specially designed recliners in a larger room where needles are placed in their body according to their health issues. They stay as long as they want for up to an hour. Those sessions are around \$40, whereas private sessions are \$75 an hour or more.

"The idea of community sessions is that they are less expensive and can make acupuncture available to more individuals," Guinan said. "We can still treat anything within a group. And there is a sense of community among the group. Participants see that we all have things we have to deal with and you can actually feel the healing of a community."

He said there's a "sweetness" to it, he said. "They see others engaging in acts of self-healing."

Treating in a community setting isn't something new, said Calvert.

"In Asia, acupuncture usually occurs in a community setting," he said. "Around here, it started in Portland and became popular. Patients find the communal setting comforting while at the same time a collective energetic field is established, making individual treatment more powerful."

Karyn Williams has been an acupuncture client for more than 15 years. She currently sees Guinan and had good experience using acupuncture for fertility issues, after more than a year of trying to get pregnant.

"Eight months after I started working with him, I got pregnant," Williams said. "I continued to get acupuncture through my pregnancy, accelerating to weekly in my third trimester."

She now has acupuncture once a month and she brings her daughter, now age 2½ years old, who also is treated.

"Sean first used massage and then he introduced very small needles," Williams said. "And he's taught me some of the massage (points) so I can work with my daughter at home."

Her daughter's treatments have focused a variety of issues that change monthly but have included digestive problems.

Williams has tried community acupuncture and likes it.

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"I think it's a great option, especially for maintenance care," she said. "It's about half the price of a private session."

For those who may be reluctant to try acupuncture, Williams said, "It doesn't hurt. There is the tiniest sensation as the needles go in, but not at all unpleasant. It very relaxing. I usually fall asleep during the rest period."

For more information contact:

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JUST WHAT IS ACUPUNCTURE?

Acupuncture is an ancient Eastern healing practice that has been around for about 3,000 years. According to Alleviant Health Centers, a certified practitioner inserts thread-like needles into specific nerve points throughout the body. In Traditional Chinese Medicine (TCM), these nerves are called "meridians," and are regarded as important points along the body's communication pathways. There are specific meridians that can be targeted to treat depression and anxiety. These pathways allow qi, or energy, to travel throughout the body and bring balance to the nervous system and the immune system.

Here's a Western translation: Each needle sticks and stimulates a sensory nerve, which kicks them into communication with the brain. The brain then triggers a response from the immune system and the release of endorphins, the body's natural painkillers, to travel throughout the body and bring healing.

Most acupuncture sessions last about 30 minutes. After the needles are placed around the body, the practitioner will move them by hand or stimulate them with electrical currents to promote neurochemical activity in the body.

Reasons to consider using acupuncture to treat mental health:

It's an alternative to toxic medications. There are virtually no negative side effects to acupuncture. When used as a part of a holistic approach to treating depression, it can help you heal depression naturally.

It releases endorphins. Have you ever heard of a runner's high? The awesome feeling you have after exercising is also caused by endorphins. Endorphins are a hormone that act as a natural pain killer in the body. When needles are inserted into sensory nerves just below the skin's surface, the body stimulates a response in the immune system, which increases circulation to that area of the body and triggers the release of endorphins.

It's a good option for pregnant women. If you're expecting a child, you might want to reduce or eliminate your intake of medications to prevent adverse side effects in the child. Studies show that acupuncture is an effective option for pregnant women who do not want to take medication.

It can reduce inflammation. Because the needles act as tiny wounds throughout the body, acupuncture prompts an anti-inflammatory response from the immune system as it combats the small invasions. There is increasing evidence that chronic inflammation keeps one depressed.

It is relaxing. Yep—getting dozens of tiny needles stuck in your body is actually a pleasant experience! Most patients find their acupuncture visits to be extremely therapeutic, and some even fall asleep during the session.

It gives you much more than a mood boost. Because acupuncture aims to make the body well, not treat specific symptoms, you'll benefit from an overall increase in health. In fact, acupuncture is an effective treatment for migraine and tension headaches and has been shown to help treat allergies and infertility.

Source: Alleviant Health Centers is a national network of full-service mental health clinics specializing in integrative holistic psychiatric and innovative therapies for mood disorders and chronic pain.



Ariana Marinelli, MSOM, LAC



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Women have some control in regard to their risk for breast cancer

A physically active lifestyle can help women reduce their risk for breast cancer.

No one, regardless of their age, occupation, skin color, or socioeconomic status, is immune to cancer. In fact, individuals might be hard pressed to say no one in their family and/or circle of friends has been diagnosed with cancer at some point.

According to the National Cancer Institute, there were 18.1 million new cancer cases across the globe in 2018. Among women, when excluding non-melanoma skin cancer, no cancer was more prevalent globally than breast cancer. The World Cancer Research Fund reports that, in 2018, breast cancer accounted for 25.4 percent of all new cancer diagnoses in women. That figure is nearly three times as high as the percentage of cases of colorectal cancer, which accounted for the second most new cancer cases diagnosed in women in 2018.

It's understandable to be fearful of such figures, which can make a breast cancer diagnosis seem almost inevitable. However, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention notes that not all risk factors for breast cancer are set in stone. Though age and family history, two known risk factors for breast cancer, may be beyond a woman's control, she still can exercise some control over other risk factors.

- **Physical activity:** The CDC notes that women who are not physically active have a higher risk of getting breast cancer than those who are. The Office on Women's Health, a division of the U.S. Department of Health & Human Services, notes that women should get two hours and 30 minutes of moderate-intensity aerobic physical activity every week or 75 minutes of vigorous-intensity aerobic activity each week. This should be accompanied by muscle-strengthening activities on two or more days each week. Carrying around extra weight can make moving around more difficult, so the Office on Women's Health urges larger women to start slowly if it's been awhile since they exercised. In addition, aging women can speak with their physicians for advice about exercise regimens they should or need not avoid.

- **Taking hormones:** The CDC notes that hormone replacement therapies that include both estrogen and progesterone taken during menopause can increase a woman's risk for breast cancer when taken for more than five years. In addition, the CDC reports that oral contraceptives, such as birth control pills, have been linked to a higher risk for breast cancer. Women can speak with their physicians about how to control hormone-related risk factors for breast cancer.

- **Alcohol consumption:** Studies have found that the more alcohol a woman consumes the greater her risk for breast cancer becomes.

Smoking, exposure to chemicals that have been found to cause cancer and changes in hormones related to working night shifts are some additional risk factors for breast cancer that women may be able to control.

Breast cancer affects millions of women across the globe each year. Though that may instill a feeling of helplessness, women should know that many risk factors for breast cancer are within their control.



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By Leslie Kelly

Amy Pacifera used to work for a paycheck. Now she works to create and share with others the fine products she makes.

"I worked for years and years and years as a baker and café manager, and as a barista," Pacifera said. "It felt like I was just doing it to get a paycheck. It didn't have a lot of meaning."

That was about three years ago and when she became pregnant, she took time off work.

"It gave me time to think about what I really wanted to do," she said. "I thought about going back to school or finding a new career. But nothing seemed to feel right."

Soon after that she and her husband were attending a Christmas party at her aunt Linda's house when another person at the party mentioned she was going to sell her business. That person was Lyn Faas, the owner and creator of Bunny's Bath. Amy knew Lyn and knew of her soap and skincare line.

"When she said that, my husband and I looked at each other like we were thinking the same thing," she said.

They went home and talked about it and decided it was a really good fit.

"Lyn invited us to a New Year's Day party at her house and it was there that we told her that we wanted to buy the business," she said. "It was just an amazing opportunity."

Faas is an environmental chemist and began Bunny's Bath in 2002. In the beginning, she made soap and gave it away to friends and family. Then she expanded to selling her soaps at farmers markets and in a few select businesses. Soon she had a diverse product line and offered her products via wholesale, private label and an online retailer.

Bunny's Bath, named for a cute picture of a bunny in a bathtub, includes carefully chosen plant-based oils and other natural ingredients. Avoiding synthetic materials and making the soaps, lotions, face care products and other items exceptional in quality has always been the goal at Bunny's Bath.

"As an experienced chemist, Lyn knows all about temperature and time," Pacifera said. "Those skills translated well when creating these products."

As a part of the business transition, Lyn worked with Amy for about six months, training her in every aspect of Bunny's Bath.



Bunny's Bath is the place for handmade soaps and skincare products

"We worked really, really well with each other and it absolutely felt like the right thing," Pacifera said. "Buying the business was just what I needed, and I dove right in."

Pacifera and her husband renovated and relocated the business to the garage of their house. That's where the magic happens. Products are made there, and they are packages and shipped from a smaller shed behind the garage.

Since purchasing the business in 2018, sales at both the online store and at retail locations which stock her products have increased about 300 percent, Pacifera said.

"There's just been huge growth online and we've added retail locations," she said. "I have hired a part-time



employee and we're just about at our max with the space we have in our garage."

Her hope is to find a location where soaps and other items can be made in the back part of the building with the front portion being her own retail store.

Pacifera, who grew up in a small town in Nebraska, left home in 2011 and moved to Portland to experience big city life. It was there that she met her husband, and in 2016, they decided they wanted a life in smaller town and moved to Port Townsend.

"We had visited here many times, because my aunt and uncle live in Port Townsend," she said. "We would come for the weekend every two or three months and this community just seemed to be everything we were looking for."

Bunny's Bath now has a new logo, a Bunny on the moon, which Pacifera said in the Chinese culture means the Elixir of Life.

Bunny's Bath products include a foaming hand soap, bar soaps, seasonal soaps, and "conversational" soaps such as a rainbow-colored soap named "Fly Your Flag." There are lotions, skin balm, scrubs, perfumes, and body mists. There's hair care shampoo and conditioner, and a line for men. Special products like diaper balm are made for babies, and there's soy candles and lavender room-freshening air spray.

Pacifera says products are priced "pretty much on par with other single batch small business producers."

"We will never compete with the big guys – Aveno and Neutrogena," she said. "We strive to use high quality oils at reasonable prices."

One of the most popular products is the soothing skin balm, often referred to as a "magic balm."

"People buy it and use it almost like a prescription for their skin ailments," Pacifera said.

Two ounces is \$12, and Pacifera said it lasts a "pretty good length of time."

The most popular item she has is the foaming hand soap.

"We are the only small business in the Pacific Northwest that makes a foaming hand soap in small batches," she said. Eight ounces sells for \$8 in a pump bottle and refill soap can be purchased in a 32 ounce or gallon bottle, for \$20, and \$63.

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"We are committed to reducing the use of plastic," she said. "So, our gallon jugs are refillable."

The company also has a skin care line, which was created by the previous owner and was named MyLyn. When Pacifera bought the company, she renamed the skincare line Humxn Skin Care.

"The formula is the same," she said. "It's made with plant oils and fruit oils and is really, really great. When Lyn created it, she did her research."



Packaging balm

She began looking for a new name for the line. She kept coming back to the term human, she said. She wanted something that would be gender inclusive.

"I thought about how Hispanic is often referred to as LatinX," she said. "And that's when I came up with Humxn."

Items include exfoliating scrub, calming and brightening creams, oatmeal facial soap, eye treatments and lip balm.

Pacifera has three practices that she follows for her business: crafting highest quality products, providing attentive, personalized customer service and practicing continuous improvement.

Bunny's Bath products and the Humxn Skin Care line can be purchased online at bunnysbath.com or look for products at the Port Townsend Food Co-op, Chimacum Corner Farmstand, Finnriver Farm and Cidery in Chimacum and Country Aire Natural Foods.

The company also has partnerships with other businesses such as the Herb Farm Resort in Woodinville, where the products are sold with the Herb Farm label.

Customer Kerry Hastings, of Bellingham, said she can't pick a favorite Bunny's Bath product.

"Gosh, I use so many," she said. "Her soaps are amazing. When I lather up with Bunny's Bath soaps, I have never found (a scent) I didn't like."

Hastings, 38, learned of the brand when she lived in Port Townsend. She said she initially used the soaps to

support Amy, who is a friend, but has since fallen in love with the company and the products which have quality ingredients. She and her husband both use the deodorant. And Hastings loves the lotions.

"They are so creamy and rich and moisturizing," she said. "I feel like I am pampering myself."

She also uses the face serum and micellar water.

"Everything is absolutely worth every penny," she said. "For quality, small-batch products that are out there, you aren't going to find many that are as well sourced and well-priced as Bunny's Bath."

Check out the company at www.bunnysbath.com.



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If you've ever experienced **HEARTBURN,** you know why it's called that



- you feel a burning sensation in your throat and upper chest, and even a bad taste in your mouth. While heartburn can have many triggers and causes, it is essentially due to the backward flow of acid, called acid reflux, when the muscles controlling the flow between the esophagus and stomach don't close completely.

Heartburn can be very unpleasant, but fortunately there are simple things you can do to help prevent heartburn symptoms - and relieve them when they arise.

"Start by just taking note of

when you experience your heartburn symptoms," said board-certified gastroenterologist, internist and wellness expert Dr. Roshini Raj. "That can help you figure out the best ways to prevent it from recurring."

Raj recommends keeping a simple diary or keeping track (in your phone or calendar) of when and what you eat for a few weeks, and what times of day you have heartburn symptoms. This can help you figure out which of the following strategies will be the most effective.

Notice post-meal or after-snack heartburn?

Some foods and drinks have been known to trigger episodes of heartburn, such as:

- * **Spicy, fried or fatty foods**
- * **Garlic and onions**

- * **Acidic foods such as citrus fruit/juice or tomatoes/tomato products**

- * **Chocolate**

- * **Coffee, tea, alcohol, carbonated beverages**

If you notice that you often have heartburn after eating or drinking one of these common triggers, try eliminating it from your diet for a while to see if you notice a difference, then re-introduce it and observe if your symptoms return. Then you'll know what your personal heartburn trigger is.

In other cases, how you eat can be just as much the culprit as what you eat.

"Slowing down while you eat, and eating smaller meals more frequently, can help prevent symptoms from flaring up," said Raj. "Avoid getting overfull to help reduce heartburn."

Feeling the burn after intense exercise?

"Exercise and keeping your weight at healthy levels are actually great lifestyle practices overall for heartburn prevention," said Raj. "But if you exercise too soon after a large meal, you could be experiencing acid reflux due to that timing."

Eat lightly before any vigorous exercise session, or wait longer after a meal before exerting yourself more than going for a walk. Exercises involving bending over or lying down, in particular, can provoke heartburn symptoms if you do them too soon after eating.

Heartburn at bedtime?

Close to bedtime, your body slows down its processes in preparation for sleep, including digestion processes.

"Eating too close to bedtime can produce heartburn," said Raj. "Try not eating - not even snacks - for a few hours before bedtime and see if that alleviates your symptoms."

Another cause for heartburn at bedtime is simple gravity: When you're standing or sitting, acid from foods you've eaten tends to stay down in your stomach. But when you lie down too soon after eating, this can cause a flare up of heartburn. Some people find it helpful to use a wedge-shaped cushion to raise their upper body.

Need relief at any time?

The other good news about heartburn is that you can find quick relief through effective, over-the-counter medications.

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Answers to 6 common questions about COVID-19 VACCINES

(BPT) - COVID-19 vaccines are authorized by the U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA) for widespread use for those who are eligible. But while vaccines are now more accessible, vaccination rates are slowing across the country.

Those still uncertain about whether the COVID-19 vaccine is right for them can look to trusted health experts within their communities like pharmacists to address key questions or concerns about getting the vaccine, the vaccination process, and common or expected side effects. Dr. Kevin Ban, Walgreens chief medical officer, addresses six common questions about getting the vaccine.

1. What are the benefits of getting a COVID-19 vaccine?

Getting a COVID-19 vaccine has many benefits, including reducing the chances of severe illness if you do get sick with COVID-19 and allowing you to get back to pre-pandemic activities, like gathering indoors without a mask. Additionally, getting the vaccine can help prevent you from getting and spreading the virus that causes COVID-19 to those around you.

COVID-19 can have serious, life-threatening complications that may lead to hospitalization, intensive care or even death. There is no way to know how contracting COVID-19 might affect you, or anyone else, so it's important to get the vaccine to protect yourself and those around you. With COVID-19 vaccine rollout, infections have declined significantly, according to the CDC, but more people need to get vaccinated to continue to reduce community spread and protect from variants that have proven to be more transmissible. The benefits of the vaccine outweigh the risks associated with getting COVID-19, Ban said.

2. COVID-19 vaccines were developed quickly, how do I know they're safe?

Vaccines were evaluated in clinical trials with tens of thousands of participants, meeting the FDA's rigorous scientific standards for safety, efficacy and manufacturing quality needed to support emergency use authorization.

In addition, the safe and speedy roll-out of the COVID-19 vaccines is backed up by decades of research from a variety of prestigious medical and research institutions on this type of vaccine. Millions of people in the U.S. have received COVID-19 vaccines and these vaccines have undergone the most intensive safety monitoring in U.S. history, the CDC said. Experts are regularly reviewing and monitoring adverse events to assess whether there is a true safety concern.

Vaccines have played a vital role in protecting the health and safety of communities throughout history.

3. Are there any long-term side effects caused by the vaccine?

Some people will experience no side effects at all, while others may experience common

short-term symptoms, like pain at the injection site or tiredness. These are normal signs that your body is building protection against COVID-19 and should go away in just a few days. Talk to your doctor or pharmacist about taking over-the-counter medicine like ibuprofen to relieve any arm soreness or aches you may feel after getting vaccinated.

Serious side effects are extremely rare following any vaccination, including COVID-19 vaccination. The FDA required each of the authorized COVID-19 vaccines to be studied for at least two months after the final dose even though anticipated effects occurred weeks before that. Hundreds of millions of people have received COVID-19 vaccines, and no long-term side effects have been detected, according to the CDC. Pharmacists are trained to respond and manage any instances of allergic reactions in the rare case they occur, as well as report to the CDC.

4. Do I really need more than one dose of the Pfizer or Moderna COVID-19 vaccines?

If you receive a Pfizer or Moderna vaccine, it's vital that you receive both doses to get the maximum protection they provide, Ban said. Although the first dose provides some level of protection, the exact length of time you are protected is unknown. Getting the second dose sends a powerful response to your immune system to boost your antibodies, making them more effective against COVID-19.

If you've waited longer than the recommended time between doses, it's better to get the second dose late than not at all. Get the second shot as soon as possible if you missed the recommended window.

5. If I'm young and healthy, why do I need a vaccine?

Although COVID-19 symptoms can vary from person to person, people can get very sick and have complications, long-lasting symptoms or die from contracting the virus. COVID-19 can also be transmitted to others if you're infected, even if you don't have any symptoms. Further, the Delta variant, deemed by the CDC a "variant of concern" for being more transmissible, continues to spread, accounting for more than 10% of COVID-19 cases in the U.S.

Until more people are vaccinated against COVID-19, the virus will continue to mutate. The vaccine is meant to protect not only you, but also those around you, like family members and friends who may have weakened immune systems.

6. Where do I go to get a vaccine?

You can conveniently and safely get the COVID-19 vaccine at numerous locations including your primary care provider, off-site vaccination clinics or at your local pharmacy. Not only do they have pharmacists to help answer any questions you may have, but they are now offering same day and walk-in appointments.

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How to hike safely in remote areas

Many people have rediscovered the great outdoors in the wake of the COVID-19 outbreak. Social distancing measures have greatly restricted indoor gatherings, but outdoor activities, particularly once parks were reopened, allowed people to get out of their homes while still keeping their distance from others.

Remote hiking trails provide perfect opportunities to experience the wonder of nature while social distancing, but it's imperative that hikers take certain precautionary measures on such excursions in order to stay safe.

- **Pack extra clothing.** Extra clothing is vital on a remote hiking excursion for a number of reasons. Some extra socks, a wind- and rain-resistant jacket and an extra pullover can help hikers stay warm and dry if the weather changes while they're hiking and trying to return to their vehicles. In addition, extra clothing can help hikers stay warm if they suffer an injury while hiking and need to camp overnight once the sun goes down.

- **Pack extra food.** Extra food and water is just as vital when hiking remote areas as extra clothing. Extra food can make emergency situations more manageable, helping people avoid hunger if they need to camp overnight or simply keep their energy up on long hikes. Trail mix tends to be high in calories and full of

protein, making it an ideal, easily packed food to bring along on a hiking trip.

- **Don't go it alone.** Solo hiking can be a great way to connect with nature, but it's always best to hike remote areas with at least one other person. Hiking in pairs ensures someone is there to seek help if a hiker is injured and rendered immobile while out on the trails.

- **Let others know your whereabouts.** If going on a solo hike or even with a partner, share your location and intended hiking route with a loved one who is not coming along for the hike. Let this person know when you intend to return and that you will call them when you safely make it back to your vehicle. If the call never comes, your loved one can then alert the appropriate authorities and share detailed information about where you are hiking.

- **Bring maps.** Pack a road map showing the way to the trail and a map of the park itself. Remote areas may not have the best internet connections, rendering car GPS systems useless. And a printed map of the park can help hikers reduce their risk of getting lost once inside the park. Pick up or order a map of the park in the days prior to your trip. Don't wait until you arrive at the park to get a map, as the park may not have any on hand.

Hiking remote areas is an ideal activity in the age of social distancing. But safety must be a priority on such trips.

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Your Microbiome: Key to Digestion & Mood

If you're struggling with digestion, immune health, mood or energy and searching for answers, it may be time to investigate a vast world in your belly: the gut microbiome.

Your microbiome is made up of the diverse community of microbes that reside in your gut. What many people ignore when discussing the microbiome is the fact that it is not only involved in digestion – in fact, gut bacteria are also strongly linked to your brain. The gut is like a second brain producing many of your important neurotransmitters. Your gut function and microbes can regulate how you feel and what emotions you perceive.

Poor microbiome is associated with a host of chronic conditions, including allergies, autoimmunity, digestive disorders, cardiovascular disease, anxiety, brain fog, fatigue and depression. Because of its critical importance to our physiology, many argue that the gut microbiome constitutes another human organ, an extension of ourselves.

Cultivate Your Microbiome

It is important to maintain the diversity and integrity of your ecosystem. Microbiome cultivation optimizes health over time. Here are some of our favorite ways to support your microbes every day:

1. Avoid antibiotics when possible.

Antibiotics profoundly impact your gut microbiome. There is a time and place for these medicines. Make sure to talk about this with your doctor when antibiotics are suggested.

2. Eat probiotics.

Probiotics, in capsule or through fermented foods, are especially important when you have a disturbance in your gut microbes. Encapsulated probiotic strains, fermented milk products (yogurt and kefir) and fermented vegetables (kimchi and sauerkraut) are significant sources of Lactobacillus and are great daily options for probiotics.

3. Eat organic.

Another source of antibiotic exposure is through non-organic foods (dairy, meat and eggs). Herbicides and insecticides used in vegetable production are also associated with microbiome disruptions.

4. Avoid plastics.

Phthalates, a type of chemical found in many plastics, cosmetics and synthetic fragrances, can also contribute to dysbiosis. Avoid heating your food in plastic and opt for natural cosmetics.

5. Eat fresh, unprocessed food.

Preservatives are put in foods to kill microbes. Read labels to avoid preservatives (sorbic acid, benzoic acid, propionic acid) in food.

6. Fiber, fiber, fiber.

Did we mention fiber? Tough plant fibers are essential for microbial and intestinal health. Dubbed “prebiotics,” these indigestible fibers are a crucial source of food for bacteria. Sources include green leafy vegetables, apples, whole oats, flax seed. Inulin is a prebiotic found in high amounts in dandelion greens, Jerusalem artichokes, and chicory root.



7. Embrace the rainbow.

Colorful fruits and vegetables contain flavonoids and polyphenols. These plant compounds favorably influence microbial communities. You can find them in significant amounts in dark chocolate, berries, red wine, coffee, tea, and certain vegetables like spinach and artichokes.

Your microbiome and gut health are far-reaching. At Prosper, we have a variety of tools for assessing your microbiome. This is a key component of holistic health. If you struggle with persistent gas and bloating, constipation or diarrhea, or even anxiety and depression, let's look for the deeper cause. Reach out for a consultation today. We are here to help.



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