

# the gut-brain connection



Nick Eager is a qualified Naturopath who works in the Balance Centre at Erina. As a parent and therapist Nick is passionate about treating children's health and behavioural disorders and believes that through a structured, scientific and holistic approach effective results can be seen without the need for medications.

**H**ippocrates who is known as the father of medicine is often quoted as saying that "all disease begins in the gut". Unfortunately what he knew back then has largely been forgotten in today's medicine.

Human beings have been divided into different systems and areas; such as the cardiovascular system, immune system, digestive system and nervous system to name a few. The benefit of this is that we have been able to gather incredible amounts of information for each system however the unfortunate thing is that a

specialist of a particular system very rarely pays any attention to the rest of the body.

Psychiatry is one area that is particularly prone to separate its organ – the brain, from the rest of the body. Mental and behavioural problems are looked at from many different angles such as genetics, bad childhood experiences, and a lack of discipline to name a few. Unfortunately the digestive system is often the last place to be considered as the cause of these issues. The fact of the matter is that almost if not all of the behavioural and mental conditions out there especially those seen in children such as ADD/ADHD, autism, and aspergers have some underlying digestive malfunction going on.

When we think of bacteria we often think of something bad that needs to be killed or disinfected. Not all bacteria are bad though, in fact if we had no bacteria in us we would die. Our bowel contains around 500 different strains of bacteria weighing up to 2 kilograms, and for every cell in our body there are ten times as many bacteria! There are beneficial bacteria and there are opportunistic bacteria living in our bowel and the beneficial ones keep the opportunistic ones under control. The beneficial ones or pro-biotics are essential for digestion and absorption of food and the stimulation of the body's immune system, in fact over 70% of our immune system is in the bowel. These pro-biotics also manufacture



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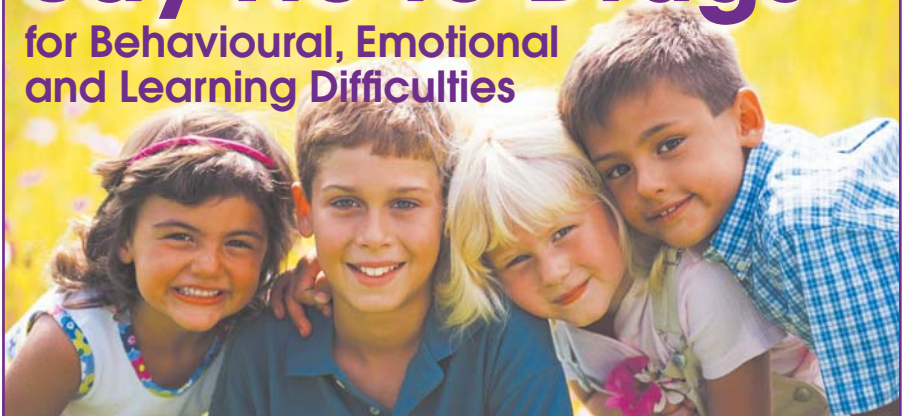
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various vitamins, enzymes, antimicrobials, and neurotransmitters. The neurotransmitter serotonin which is often found to be low in children with behavioural problems is also mostly made in the bowel.

As you can see a healthy bowel is extremely important for a healthy immune and nervous system. When the beneficial bacteria are depleted or do not develop properly due to poor diet, stress, antibiotics, medications such as pain killers and steroids, lack of breast feeding, caesarean births, and exposure to various toxins and chemicals; the defences break down.

When this happens a variety of signs, symptoms and conditions can occur such as leaky gut, bloating, bad breath, stomach pain, constipation and/or diarrhoea, allergies, asthma, autism, ADD/ADHD and other behavioral conditions are just a few of what can go wrong.

Hippocrates is also quoted as saying "let your food be your medicine" meaning that we should use food to treat before anything else. Without a good diet as a

foundation in our lives any supplement, herbal medicine or drug that we take can be done in vain. Therefore it is vital that we eat food that is life giving not life taking.

Even though some foods may seem healthy and good to give to a child they may in fact be causing more problems. Take wheat and dairy for instance, both very common foods in our society, however in children with gut problems and behavioural and learning issues they can be causing a lot of trouble. The reason being is that the proteins in wheat (gluten) and dairy (casein) do not get digested properly and turn into substances with similar chemical structures to opiates, like morphine and heroin. These then cross the blood-brain barrier and block certain areas of the brain, just like morphine and heroin do. So you can see how what may seem like a "brain" condition is actually a digestive disorder, and this is why studies have shown a 60-70% improvement in behaviour and learning when children have had these foods removed from their diet.

Even though this may all sound a bit daunting and overwhelming there are a few simple things that can be done to maintain a healthy digestive system or repair a damaged one.

1. when possible have a natural birth instead of a caesarean
2. breast feed for as long as possible
3. stay away from antibiotics unless absolutely necessary
4. use probiotics after any course of antibiotics
5. make sure the diet is as natural and unprocessed as possible
6. when needed, support their immune system with Vitamin C, and herbs such as Olive Leaf and Echinacea

In my next article I will focus on the immune system and fever management which is fast becoming a dying art.

For further information please contact Nick Eager on 02 4367 8777 Monday to Friday or on e-mail at nick@totalchiropractic.com.au

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