

Gut Health and Anxiety Load

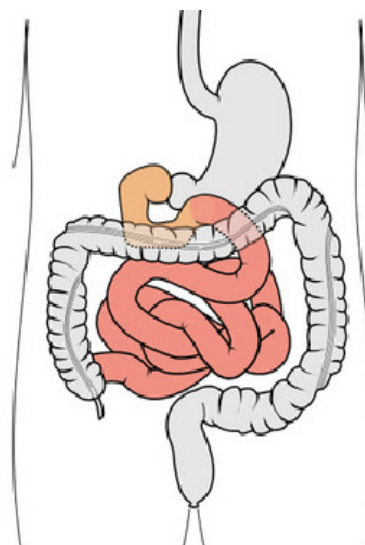
In our work we meet many people presenting with various life challenges within the physical, emotional and mental planes. Not surprisingly, these challenges commonly cross all planes, manifesting as imbalances in the physical body. The “big three” common imbalances (as I call them), we see on a regular basis are depression, headaches and gut problems. When I describe gut problems, it's mostly from below the stomach, affecting the bowel, small intestine and into the pelvis. Despite what you may have read in some self-help book, there is no set formula or emotion responsible for these health problems. The underlying cause of these imbalances are usually complex and unique to each individual. In this article I want to explore the importance of a healthy gut or digestive system.

Just how important is it?

One of the surprises of the Human Genome Project was the discovery that the human genome contains only 20,000 to 25,000 protein-coding genes, about a fifth the number researchers had expected to find. To search for the missing pieces that could account for this discrepancy, researchers started looking toward other sources of genetic material that contribute to human function. One of these sources was the human microbiome.¹

The microbiome is defined as the collective genomes of the microbes (composed of bacteria, bacteriophage, fungi, protozoa and viruses) that live inside and on the human body. We have about 10 times as many microbial cells as human cells. So, to study the human as a "supraorganism," composed of both non-human and human cells, in 2007 the National Institutes of Health (NIH) launched the Human Microbiome Project (HMP) as a conceptual extension of the Human Genome Project.¹ Most of the microbes in the microbiome do not cause disease. In fact, humans rely on microbes to perform many important functions that we cannot perform ourselves. Microbes digest food to generate nutrients for host cells, synthesise vitamins, metabolise drugs, detoxify carcinogens, stimulate renewal of cells in the gut lining and activate and support the immune system.¹ Establishing what constitutes a healthy microbiome is important because high or low microbial diversity can have different implications for health or disease, depending on the body site. For example, it has been shown that low microbial diversity in the gut is associated with obesity, inflammatory bowel disease and Crohn's disease, whereas high microbial diversity in the vagina is often associated with bacterial vaginosis, the most common type of vaginal infection.

I'm sure this information is not new to you. Most people are aware that the foods we consume have a major impact on the health of our gut. Natural, unprocessed, whole foods serve us well, whereas highly processed, high sugar content foods, all disrupt the balance. Alcohol, parasites, additives, medications, antibiotics, pollutants, high levels of salt and stress, also disrupt the gut balance or microbiome. Of course this can be very specific to an individual and also dependant on racial DNA. Just as an aside, our guides suggest that only a limited portion of the population is suitable to a vegetarian diet, and the human body was never designed to be totally vegan.



But that's a debate for another time. The question is, while many of our clients are acutely aware of all this information, and are doing everything in their power to eat healthy, why does a problem continue with their gut? This problem, by the way, is evident across a wide age group.

Let's look at Stress

In broad terms, stress is the absence of homeostasis or an imbalance in the harmonious workings of the organism, which results in the body's concerted effort to re-establish that balance. Homeostasis or homeostasis (homeo- + -stasis) is the property of a system in which variables are regulated so that internal conditions remain stable and relatively constant. Examples of homeostasis include the regulation of temperature and the balance between acidity and alkalinity (pH). The human body is in a constant state of flux, and is continually looking to create and maintain balance. It's all about cause and effect, and the balancing act is done automatically by the miraculous design of the human body. The stress response, triggers the release of powerful hormones that generate arousal and anxiety. For example, in humans, elevation of the chemical stress pathway (glucocorticoids) tends to be associated with depression, whereas elevation of the electrical stress pathway (epinephrine) more frequently is correlated with anxiety. There are discrete differences in the hormonal response to acute stress compared with chronic stress.⁴

Within the research of Psychoneuroimmunology, Dr Robert Ader² (1932-2011) effectively demonstrates that chronic stress is destructive to health, creating an unremitting suppression of the immune system. The kidneys and adrenal glands are most affected with symptoms of chronic fatigue also evident. Yes, fear is a factor in stress and therefore kidney problems, but it is not the whole story. Basically it is the fight or flight response causing the body to direct it's efforts toward defence, rather than bodily maintenance. Blood and other nutrients are directed away from non-vital functions and sent to your heart and other muscles ready for you to either run or fight for your survival. While this is happening you can't digest your food and general cellular repair is put on hold. In our modern society the programmed response to the threat of attack from a sabre toothed tiger has been replaced by the threat of not achieving or performing. There's probably no new understanding for you in this either. After all, Traditional Chinese Medicine has linked fear with kidney problems for thousands of years. But in regards to stress, how does this relate to a young, well educated 25 year old woman, with a supportive partner, in her dream job, and motivated in maintaining a healthy lifestyle which includes regular yoga sessions?

How is it they still experience chronic gut problems? We encounter this on a regular basis, where clients approach us with a specific problem, and we discover there are gut problems which are a secondary concern. Successful, intelligent, people who outwardly depict a picture of health will admit they have experienced some form of gut problem most of their life. Ruling out hereditary imbalances such as celiac disease, or other, it's mostly due to anxiety, and it's part of the human condition.



Anxiety is a general term for several disorders that cause nervousness, fear, worry, and apprehension. These disorders affect how we feel and behave, and they can manifest real physical symptoms. Anxiety is something that affects all of us to varying degrees, and again,

it's part of being human. Why are some people more affected than others, depends on how they deal with it and what I term as "anxiety load". Anxiety load is due to many different factors including relationship stress, work commitments, feelings of not achieving, financial challenges, past emotional experiences, and the list goes on. It's dealing with life really, isn't it? A panic attack may be viewed as the anxiety load reaching critical mass. Within the biofield, a person prone to anxiety and panic, will display red, inflamed, energy in the area of the diaphragm and sometimes upper chest. This commonly goes hand in hand with indicators of headaches.

In my opinion, there are two significant factors affecting the anxiety load. One factor is most relevant to modern society, wherein we are constantly bombarded with advertising on how we should look, what we should be driving, what clothes we need to be successful and so on. Evidence shows that these socio-cultural influences play a role in the development of eating disorders, particularly among people who internalise the Western beauty ideal of thinness.³ These socio-cultural influences add to the anxiety load. The other significant factor in my opinion, is past emotional events that have yet to be resolved. This is the aspect we most commonly deal with. It may not be one specific experience; it could be from a childhood of feeling unloved, as an example. This adds to the anxiety load, albeit forgotten on the conscious level.

We hear it all the time when prompting a client to recount experiences at a particular age. "I haven't thought about that for a long time", is a common response. But guess what, the vibrations and emotions of that experience may have continued to affect the body long after the event. Sounds like post traumatic stress disorder, doesn't it?

So there are many potential aspects that can add to the anxiety load and are unique to every individual. Again, it's the imperfect human condition.

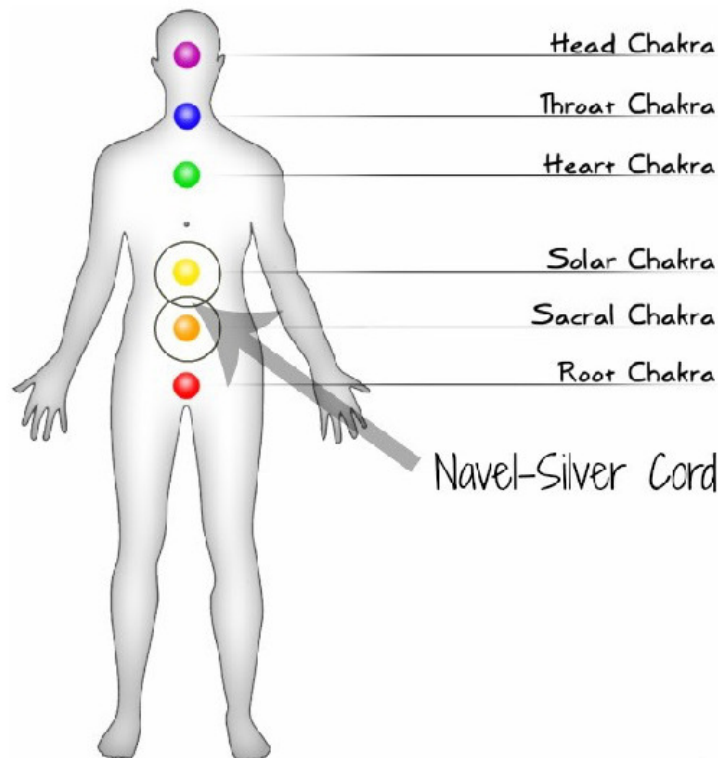
So what changes occur to cause chronic gut problems?

The answer to this question is quite complex and it's not possible to point to any single aspect of the body as the answer. Considerations include electrical, energetic and hormonal responses to emotional states. The initial response to a high anxiety load, is a change to the acid production within the stomach. There is overwhelming experimental and clinical evidence that stress influences gastric function.⁶ This then has a cascading affect on the rest of the digestive tract and ultimately the gut microbiome. In extreme cases the imbalance has the potential to create the opportunity for the ulcer causing bacteria called *Helicobacter pylori* (*H. pylori*).^{7,8} Long term changes have significant health implications due to improper assimilation of food, and overgrowth of parasites.

In response to these changes the body reacts to maintain balance through homeostasis. On the energetic level, there is a response from the solar plexus and sacral chakras to both the physical changes and the emotional input from anxiety. We need to consider that the anxiety load is likely to have been affecting the chakras for many years, after all we are energy beings. Long term emotional imbalance, even at a subtle level, affects the function of the chakras which in turn affects the related organs. This creates challenges in processing food and energy flow. The solar plexus chakra, with it's yellow energy flow, is considered the seat of personal power; self esteem; centre of beliefs; fears; drive for success and organisational abilities. This chakra is located in the soft area just below the sternum or breastbone and controls the stomach, intestines, pancreas and adrenals. Some consider the solar plexus chakra is the seat of lower emotions. The posterior aspect is thought to be an intellectual template and includes your unconscious beliefs about power, success and your worthiness. Through the anterior aspect we gain knowledge of things seen and unseen, based upon our belief systems; also tap into the energies we need to make effective life decisions. This chakra works in tandem with the sacral chakra which shares responsibility for the small intestine and organs in the pelvis.

The sacral chakra with it's orange energy is positioned about two fingers width down from the navel. This chakra is considered a seat of creativity and feelings. It governs the sexual and reproductive organs, the bladder, and part of the lower intestine.

The front aspect contains our feeling bodies, which operate as entities unto themselves. How you express your feelings into the world or your ability to translate your feelings into creative responses. The back or posterior aspect of the chakra processes feelings about us in relation to the holistic Universe, and is open to the vibrations and energies necessary for creativity and expression. The sacral chakra is also connected to the throat which is another seat of creativity and expression. The two chakras work in tandem with a third energetic association. Where the chakras overlap, you find the navel and the silver cord connection. I've written about the silver cord in a previous eZine⁵ and don't want to get into that now.

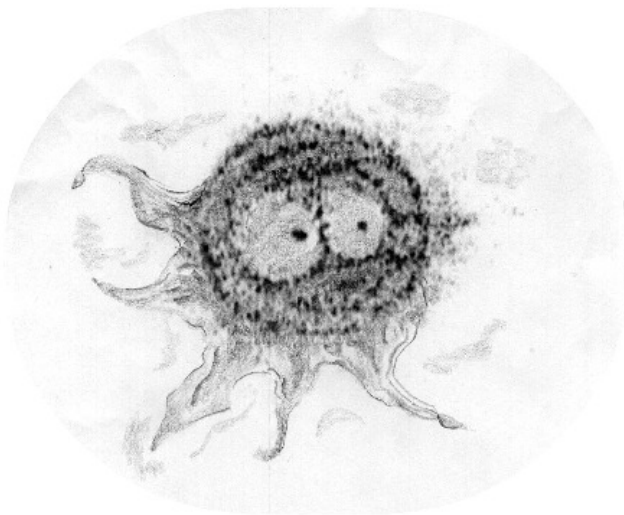


In Traditional Chinese Medicine, Dantian or Tan T'ien is loosely translated as "elixir field", "sea of qi", or simply "energy center". Dantian are important focal points for meditative and exercise techniques such as qigong, martial arts such as t'ai chi ch'uan, and in traditional Chinese medicine.⁹ The lower dantian area is below the navel (about three finger widths below and two finger widths behind the navel), which is also called "the golden stove" or the namesake "cinnabar field" proper, where the process of developing the elixir by refining and purifying essence (jing) into vitality (qi) begins.¹⁰ Obviously this lower abdomen area has been recognised as an important energy centre long before the development of western medicine. If you consider the function of the two chakras and the silver cord orientating us to the earth plane, this area in the abdomen is very important in identifying who you are, both as an individual and in relation to the universe. You think with your head and you feel with your gut; it's called "gut instinct" for a reason.

So not surprisingly, emotional upsets lead to tummy upsets. It's for this same reason those with a highly developed sense of empathy, may well respond by burping or a feeling of unease in the stomach when around those who are in distress. This area of the chakra overlap is a very sensitive receptor in some people.

In the case of acute anxiety or emotional stress, the crisis may be resolved fairly quickly, and the body brought back into a healthy state of balance. However, within individuals where the anxiety load has been building over years, or has been present since early childhood, a healthy state of balance is difficult to maintain. There are constant fluctuations throughout the body until a state of chronic imbalance is accepted as normal...a type of sensory adaptation.

Emotional experiences influence the chakras and the overlapping area of the navel/silver cord, which in turn affects the associated organs. Therefore, we see clients from seven to seventy that have tolerated problems with their gut for years, even decades, despite a healthy lifestyle. Reducing the anxiety load will have a positive effect on the gut, and the sooner the better, before permanent damage occurs. Reducing the anxiety load can involve many considerations depending on the individual situation. As well as resolving current relationship problems, reducing the load will more than likely necessitate the clearing of an experience or emotion years in the past.



Along with physical manifestation of gut problems due to anxiety load, there are energetic considerations as well. Just as physical parasites and viruses can flourish in an unhappy gut, energetic parasites may also take advantage of an unbalanced environment. A disturbance in the microbiome can compromise immunity in more than just the physical. There are critters around that will take advantage of the energy imbalances

and reside within the biofield of an individual, sometimes aggravating the condition to suit its own needs. I know when a client has been experiencing long term, problems with their digestion, as the lower abdomen and pelvic areas look like a stagnant swamp. You can almost imagine the flies buzzing around.

Within that swamp, it's not uncommon to perceive critters looking back at me. This aspect of parasitic entity was introduced to me very early in my exploration of energy healing. I have included a sketch of one such critter I made years ago. It's simple enough to remove them, but care must be taken to ensure all aspects of reproduction are cleared to prevent reinfection. *You can read more on this topic at <http://www.red-spirit-energy-healing.com/entities-and-interference.html>*

So what now?

Well, it's all food for thought really, isn't it?

Oh dear...just couldn't resist that one.

Seriously though...we've established that along with diet and of course exercise, your gut health is also dependant on your emotional and energetic well being. So nurture your microbiome by reducing anxiety load, any way you can, and listen to your gut. There are a number of complexities that may be involved, but it's worth considering the emotional experience you think is long in the past, could still be influencing you. We see it on a regular basis.



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