

- Digestion / Mental health

## Gut impact on mental well-being

The Star Malaysia · 23 Sep 2024 · 14 · ASSOC PROF DR YOW YOON YEN School of Medical and Life Sciences Sunway University

IF you've never heard of "Go With Your Gut Day" before, well, today is the day. Created in the United States in 2012, Go With Your Gut Day, which has been adopted by other countries, helps to remind people to take proactive steps in improving their gut health.



Various scientific findings provide evidence that being healthy begins with a healthy gut. Our gut is home to trillions of bacteria, collectively known as the gut microbiome.

More research findings have revealed that this gut microbiome plays a crucial role not just in digestion but also other important human functions.

A local study conducted at Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia shows the critical connection between gut health and mental well-being. The researchers specifically targeted individuals suffering from irritable bowel syndrome (IBS).

The prevalence of IBS among Malaysian has been reported to be between 10% and 15%. IBS affects the large intestine with symptoms including persistent abdominal pain, bloating, gas, diarrhoea, and constipation.

IBS is also linked with coexisting mental health issues like depression. The study found that approximately 32.1% of IBS patients experience early stage depression.

This condition can subsequently escalate into major depressive disorder if left unaddressed.

Various medical findings suggest that the gut and brain communicate through the gut-brain axis, a complex network of nerves and hormones. This twoway communication can affect a person's mood and mental health.

While the study emphasised the potential of probiotics as a supplementary therapy for depression in IBS patients, it also highlighted the importance of a holistic approach to treatment.

Factors such as diet, lifestyle modifications, and individual gut microbiome composition can influence the effectiveness of probiotic therapies. Therefore, it is crucial to consider these elements when exploring gut health as a pathway to better mental health.

With the growing body of evidence linking gut health to mental well-being, promoting gut health could be a key step in improving mental health outcomes for those affected by IBS and depression.

Healthcare providers could also consider other gut-modulating therapies as part of a comprehensive strategy to combat depression, especially in vulnerable populations like those with IBS.