

# Wellness Matters

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## The Connection Between Gut and Brain Health

Recent research indicates that the communication between your brain and your gut plays a crucial role in your overall health. Scientists suggest this connection may be the reason you feel “butterflies” when you’re nervous or “sick to your stomach” when you’re dreading something. It also has a significant impact on your overall health.

### What Is the Gut-brain Connection?

The vagus nerve connects your brain and your gut (known as the gut-brain axis) and sends signals in both directions. The brain and the gut both contain neurons that tell your body how to behave. They also contain neurotransmitters, which control feelings and emotions. Interestingly, many neurotransmitters are produced in the gut. In fact, the largest amount of your body’s serotonin is produced there, impacting mood, perception, attention, and memory.

### How Does the Gut-brain Axis Work?

Your brain directly impacts the function of your stomach and intestines. For example, chronic stress can cause gastrointestinal

problems. The connection also works in reverse. The intestine can send troubled signals to the brain that cause anxiety, stress, or depression. An unhealthy gut is also linked to dementia and lowered cognitive functions.

### Tips for Improving Gut Health

Improving your gut health can contribute to brain health, enhance cognitive function, and help ward off disease. You can improve gut health with the following foods:

- Diverse foods
- Lots of fruits, vegetables, and legumes
- High-fiber foods
- Fermented foods (e.g., yogurt, kimchi, and kefir)
- Prebiotic foods
- Whole grains
- Plant-based foods
- Foods with polyphenols (e.g., red wine, grape skins, onions, and blueberries)
- Probiotics

### Conclusion

Your gut health significantly impacts the health of your brain and body. By eating foods that promote gut health, you may experience improved focus, better mental health, and reduced risk of disease.

## Most Americans Should Be Screened for Anxiety

Amid a mental health crisis, the U.S. Preventive Services Task Force (Task Force) recommends that all adults under the age of 65 get screened for anxiety regularly. Last year, the Task Force also amended recommendations to include children ages 8 to 17. This means all people 8 to 65 should be screened for anxiety.

The Task Force stops short of recommending anxiety screening for adults over 65 because many common symptoms of aging (e.g., pain, fatigue, and trouble sleeping) are also symptoms of anxiety.

### Why Is Anxiety Screening Important?

Anxiety is common. According to the American Psychiatric Association, nearly 30% of adults experience anxiety disorders at some point in their lives.

Anxiety usually begins in childhood and early adulthood, and symptoms usually decline with age. It may look different for everyone. However, common symptoms include anxious thoughts that are difficult to control, fatigue, irritability, restlessness, sleep

problems, and unexplained aches and pains.

Screening is crucial for diagnosis, as anxiety symptoms might not be noticeable during regular doctor visits. If you have symptoms of anxiety, contact your medical health care professional immediately. Don’t wait for your annual physical.

## September Is National Suicide Prevention Month

Mental illness and mental health issues often contribute to suicide. Everyone can help prevent suicide. You can save lives by dialing 988, the National Suicide and Crisis Lifeline (the Lifeline). Similar to calling 911 for physical emergencies, 988 is for people in emotional distress or suicidal crisis.



You can call 988 if you’re experiencing a mental health crisis or for somebody else who’s in distress. Call or text 988 or get help online at [988lifeline.org/chat](https://988lifeline.org/chat).

# COLD,

# FLU OR

# COVID-19?

The common **cold**, **flu** and **COVID-19** are all caused by viruses that affect your respiratory system, and all three illnesses share some symptoms. This makes it difficult to know what you may be sick with when you're feeling under the weather.

Learn more about the similarities and differences between the three illnesses below.

Cold	Flu	COVID-19
Symptoms typically come on gradually.	Symptoms usually come on suddenly and vigorously, and are more severe than a cold.	Symptoms can appear two to 14 days following exposure to COVID-19.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Common symptoms include: nasal congestion, sneezing and runny nose<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>○ Can also include cough, mild headache and minor body aches</li></ul></li><li>• Symptoms tend to last a week (you're generally contagious for first three days)</li><li>• Doctor visit is unnecessary – over-the-counter medications are generally effective</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Common symptoms include: high-grade fever, headache, muscle or body aches and fatigue<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>○ Can also include dry cough, sore throat and runny or stuffy nose, as well as nausea and vomiting (more common in children than adults)</li></ul></li><li>• Symptoms generally improve within two to five days, but can last a week or more</li><li>• You should stay home until 24 hours after fever is gone to avoid spreading the flu to others</li><li>• Prescription antiviral drugs can help decrease the severity and length of symptoms</li><li>• Complications can occur; call a doctor if you think your symptoms are worsening or if you have a condition such as asthma, diabetes or pregnancy.</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Common symptoms include: fever or chills, cough, shortness of breath, fatigue, muscle or body aches, headache, congestion and sore throat<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>○ Can also include nausea, vomiting, diarrhea and new loss of taste or smell</li></ul></li><li>• Some may experience little to no symptoms, while others may require hospitalization</li><li>• Even after recovering from COVID-19, you may experience lingering symptoms</li><li>• Complications can occur; call a doctor if you think your symptoms are worsening or if you are at a higher risk for severe illness (e.g., elderly or immunocompromised)</li></ul>

Because there is some overlap between the symptoms, it may be difficult to determine whether you have the **flu** or **COVID-19** without being tested. As such, if you believe you have the flu or COVID-19, please call your doctor and explain your symptoms *before* going to a facility to seek care.