

# Probiotics and Mental Health

While researching prebiotics and probiotics and their role in our digestive health. I came across some interesting information suggesting that they also influence our mental health as well. Moving forward, I decided to change the direction I was taking and write on this topic instead. I will start by explaining what probiotics and prebiotics are. Next, I will give some information on some of the science behind the studies, and finally, I will list some examples of pre/probiotic foods.

## Probiotic and Prebiotics

Probiotics are helpful bacteria in our guts and prebiotics are compounds that feed these bacteria to help them flourish. “The lining of your gut, like every surface of your body, is covered in microscopic creatures, mostly bacteria. These organisms create a micro-ecosystem called the microbiome. The key to a healthy microbiome is nourishing a balance among the nearly 1,000 different species of bacteria in your gut.”

## The Gut-Brain Axis

Nutritional Psychiatrists have been doing research targeting the modulation of the gut microbiota (bacteria, archea, and fungi), through probiotic and prebiotic foods and supplements as a therapy for the treatment of various neuropsychiatric conditions. “Research has revealed an extensive bidirectional communication network between the gastrointestinal tract and the central nervous system, referred to as the gut-brain axis.”

This connection between the gut, emotional, and cognitive function is so strong that it has also been termed the “second brain”. An example of this would be the feeling of nausea we sometimes get before we do something that makes us nervous. “These signals are incredibly important for your autonomic nervous system, endocrine system, and immune system.”

## Serotonin

Probiotics and prebiotics activate neural pathways that travel directly between the gut and brain. About 95% of the neurotransmitter serotonin is produced in the gastrointestinal tract. “Serotonin stabilizes our mood, feelings of well-being, and happiness”. It also assists with sleeping, eating, and digestion. The intestines produce most of the body’s serotonin. Serotonin is also required for the promotion of healthy digestion.

## Probiotic Foods

- Yogurt
- Miso Soup
- Sauerkraut (unpasteurized)
- Soft Cheeses
- Kefir
- Buttermilk
- Tempeh
- Natto



- Apple Cider Vinegar
- Kombucha
- Brine-Cured Olives
- Dark Chocolate with 70% or more cacao

## Prebiotic Foods

- Asparagus
- Apples
- Oats
- Bananas
- Barley
- Garlic
- Onions
- Leeks
- Flaxseed
- Wheat Bran
- Seaweed
- Dandelion Greens
- Cocoa



The study of prebiotics and probiotics and their role in our mental health is still in its infancy. For the most part, at least in the studies that I came across, scientists are looking into using probiotic supplements over other forms of medication. Not too much is mentioned about getting pre/probiotics directly from food, however, evidence suggests that adding them into our diets through fermented foods (probiotics) and foods rich in dietary fibre (prebiotics) aids in keeping our guts healthy which in turn helps to keep our minds healthier too!

An RHN, or Registered Holistic Nutritionist can help you with more direction to address your situation. Sessions are done virtually at your convenience. You can get more information or book an appointment by contacting [personaltraining@curtishealth.com](mailto:personaltraining@curtishealth.com)

\*mayoclinic.org

\*pubmed.ncbi.nih.gov

\*verywellmind.com

\*nutritionalpsychology.org

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