

Study to explore link between healthy gut and healthy mind

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Credit: Ryan McGuire/Pixabay

Could live bacteria ingested each day be used to prevent or treat mild anxiety and depression?

That is the question being asked by clinical psychologist Lynette Roberts who is researching the effects of twice-daily doses of a multispecies probiotic on adults suffering depressive symptoms.

"Researchers are beginning to discover just how much our mental health may be affected by the health of our gut," says Dr Roberts, a senior lecturer in the UTS Graduate School of Health.

"There is a lot to suggest that imbalances in gut bacteria are linked with changes in mood and behaviour.

"Probiotics have an anti-inflammatory effect, calming everything down, and studies are already showing they can arrest the thought processes that make people more vulnerable to mood disorders.

"Previous research has found that healthy people feel less sad, less worried and less stressed when they're taking probiotics."

Mental illness is common in Australia, especially among young people. One in four Australians aged 18 to 24 will experience a mental illness this year, with anxiety and depression being the most common causes. One in seven Australians will have depression at some time in life.

"The ability to use probiotics as a prevention or therapy for depression would give us one more tool to manage what is a very complex and challenging condition," says Dr Roberts.

"Probiotics are a low-cost, no-stigma supplement that could bridge the gap between the high rates of depression and barriers to seeking treatment, including the adverse side effects common in traditional antidepressants.

"And with depression costing the Australian economy \$13 billion a year,

probiotics could offer significant potential cost savings for the healthcare system and employers."

Dr Roberts is seeking participants aged 18 and older for her research. They need not have been diagnosed with depression but would have experienced depressive symptoms, such as low mood and not being as interested in or enjoying things as much as usual, for the past two weeks.

Participants would take a probiotic containing seven strains of bacteria twice a day for eight weeks, as well as take part in weekly monitoring.

More information: For more information or to register your interest in joining Dr Roberts's study, go to mhitpsych.com/participate

Provided by University of Technology, Sydney

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