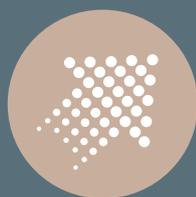


Boost wellbeing, ease stress and sleep better

by Sandie Dennis



BeyondEAP

Specialist employee support
for life's toughest challenges

letstalk@beyondeap.co.uk

beyondeap.co.uk

[in beyondeap](https://www.linkedin.com/company/beyondeap)

“How is your diet during these troubling times?”

Whenever I begin supporting a new employee, I always ask them about their eating habits.

You might think this would be a strange question, when I specialise in supporting mental health. Yet answers have included somebody taking in nothing but coffee for two whole weeks, then wondering why they were on the brink of a ‘breakdown’.

I’ve been there myself, by the way.

In my twenties, I followed a dreadful diet. I went through several losses and periods of deep trauma, and I found it extremely difficult to cope. I suffered chronic sleep issues, I was prone to depression, and I was often ill, with terrible skin complaints.

Little did I know back then, that supporting my gut health would help to make me feel so much better.



For years, I have been advocating the mental health benefits of a healthy gut, and the role it plays in creating a healthy mind.

Never has this been more important than now.

With all of us dealing with often seismic changes to our lives and routines, involving self-isolating, the challenges of lockdown, and the sad, tragic loss of friends and loved ones, boosting our mental and emotional wellbeing should be a huge priority.



My Journey to Greater Gut Health

As I studied gut health in more detail, I began to understand that there is a correlation between the stomach flora, and elements like stress, sugar, alcohol, and antibiotics.

I started 'cleaning up my act', ditching the anti-depressants, as I realised that I could improve my mood without them.

I often explain to the employees I support that in years to come, I believe GPs will hand out gut bacteria prescriptions and healthy gut diet information, rather than anti-depressants.

When the challenges of returning to our 'new normal' begin to take hold, wouldn't it be nice to know that you can create and strengthen your own internal support system? Maintaining your gut health can do just that.

Let me take you through the process.

Here Comes the Science Bit

If you're anything like me, your gut is very reactive to the changes that go on around you.

(There's a reason why "gut feelings" and "go with your gut" are such popular sayings.)

Negative news could create a 'boom' sensation, while fear could bring on rising butterflies.

These are real sensations, and they shouldn't be ignored.





Scientists have discovered that within our **enteric nervous system** in our gut, we have what is referred to as our 'second brain'.

These 100 million neurons in the wall of the gut replicate the same neurons as in our brains. These are filled with neurotransmitters such as serotonin and GABA (a neurotransmitter that has a calming, anti-anxiety effect) and all determine your mental and emotional states.

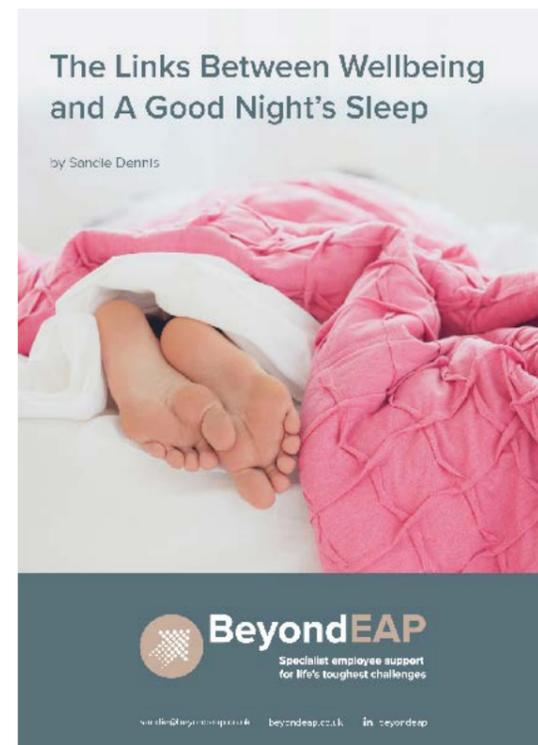
To clarify, this 'second brain' won't make decisions for you, or deal with big thought processes; it simply enables you to feel.

We now know that around 90% of these nerves carry information from the gut to the brain, when it was always thought to be the other way around. It was even discovered that 95% of our body's serotonin can be found in our bowels!



As if all this wasn't quite enough, poor gut health has been shown to negatively impact sleep, which can result in depression.

(For more information about this, you can view my eBook on sleep here.)



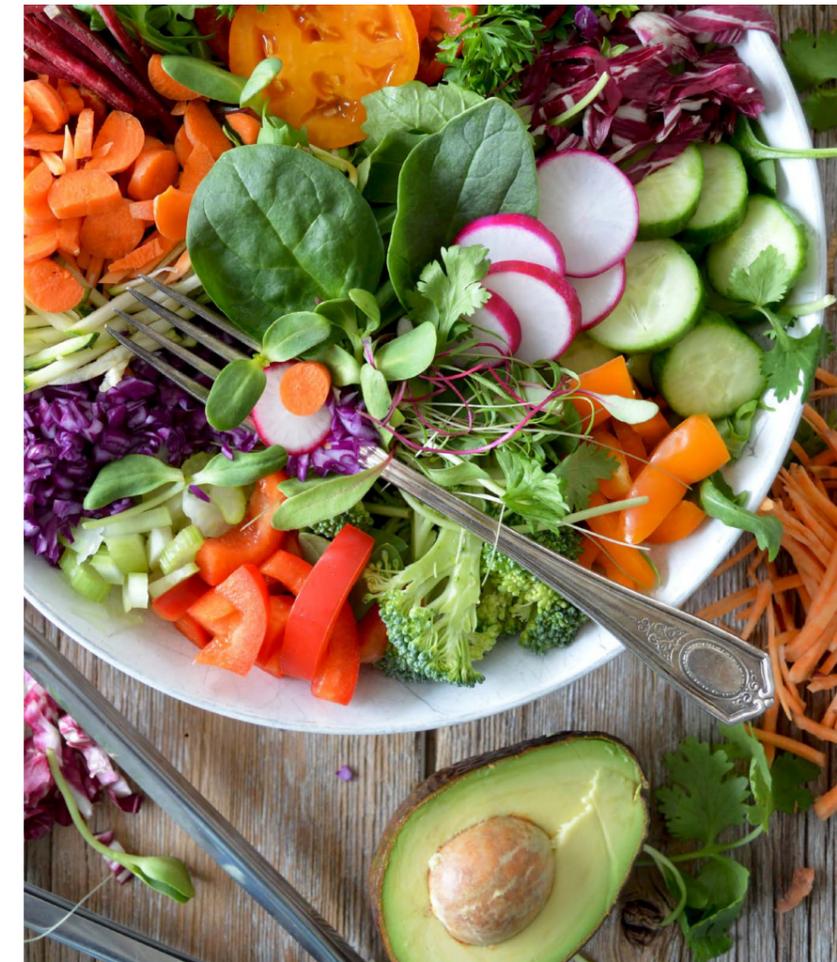
Your gut contains trillions of bacteria, viruses, and fungi – collectively known as the 'microbiome' – which ultimately help to protect you. 70% of the gut is dedicated to wiping out bugs and nasties for a healthy immune system, which is something we could all do with right now.

When we look after the bacteria in the gut, we start to feel stronger. We experience a more uplifted, balanced mood, better quality sleep, AND we create a protective line of defence.

For me, this has involved:

- ditching processed foods, (including take-aways) to cook meals from scratch,
- eliminating refined carbs, such as white bread and pasta,
- cutting out all sugar from my diet – something I found to be the hardest challenge!
- reducing coffee and alcohol (I'm only human, but when I do choose to drink, I have red wine which is high in polyphenols, thought to boost digestion),
- adding more fibre, such as nuts, legumes, and whole grains, to my diet,
- using cold-pressed, unfiltered olive oil.

I also make sure my diet incorporates plenty of variety, with new foods introduced often – this is a great excuse to try a new fruit or vegetable every once in a while!





Here are some more positive changes I have made, that you may also find useful in supporting your gut health:



Give up meat

I only eat fish these days, as it's much easier to digest (you could take a B12 vitamin supplement to compensate).

Additionally, oily fish has been shown to have a positive effect on brain health.



Eat full-fat, natural 'live' yogurt

Kefir (a fermented, yogurt-like milk drink) is another excellent choice. You could even try your hand at making your own, if you're looking for a healthy lockdown task!



Add stinky cheese

Over the years I have grown to adore eating smelly cheeses such as Comte, a French cheese made from unpasteurised cow's milk.



Try Sauerkraut

I make my own (or you can buy) 'live' sauerkraut, a type of fermented cabbage which is a natural probiotic



Increase your water intake

If you are drinking tap water, invest in a filter. This will purify the water, helping to soften its 'taste.'



Where possible, ditch the antibiotics

(However, please don't do this if the medication you are taking is lifesaving!)



Practise Mindfulness techniques regularly

This will relax your mind and body, leaving you better able to cope with stress.



Adding supplements

Taking a Vitamin D supplement supports a healthy gut and regulates inflammation and immunity. I take this all year round.



In addition, try taking a high-quality probiotic every day.

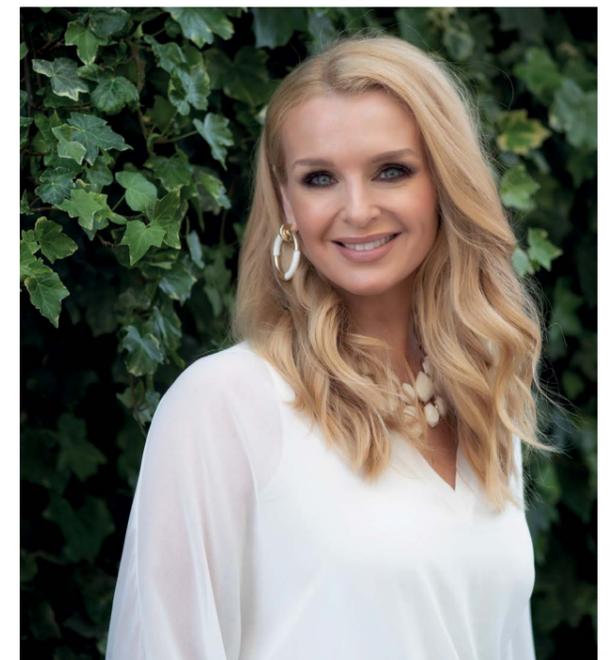
I purchase my supplements via NHP. You can use my promo code (Sandie20) for 20% off by ordering your supply from this link

Happily, research has shown that **you can reverse negative effects** on your gut microbiome in a matter of weeks.

So, why not give these tips a try? You've got nothing to lose...

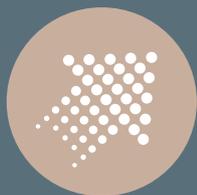
...except perhaps reduced anxiety, a stabilised mood, better sleep, and a boosted immune system.

In the meantime, please stay well and take care,



Sandie

Sandie



BeyondEAP

Specialist employee support
for life's toughest challenges

letstalk@beyondeap.co.uk

beyondeap.co.uk

[in](#) [beyondeap](#)