

# Family and Community Health “Connections” in Tom Green County



## May is ‘Mental Health Month’

When we talk about health, we can’t just focus on heart health, or liver health, or brain health, and not whole health. You have to see the whole person, and make use of the tools and resources that benefit minds and bodies together. Here are some key messages regarding mental health to keep in mind:

- Mental health is essential to everyone’s overall health and well-being, and mental illnesses are common and treatable.
- So much of what we do physically impacts us mentally. Paying attention to both your physical health and your mental health can help you achieve overall wellness and set you on a path to recovery.
- A healthy lifestyle can help to prevent the onset or worsening of mental health conditions, as well as heart disease, diabetes, obesity and other chronic health problems. It can also help people recover from these conditions.
- Eating healthy foods, managing stress, exercising, and getting enough sleep can go a long way in making you both physically and mentally healthy.
- Getting the appropriate amount of exercise benefits nearly all aspects of a person’s health. Not only does exercise help control weight, it also improves mental health, and chances of living longer and healthier.
- Recent research is connecting your gut health with your mental health. So, when it comes to diet and nutrition, it’s all about finding the right balance of nutrients to benefit both mind and body.
- Sleep plays a role in all aspects of our life and overall health. Getting a good night’s sleep is important to having enough physical and mental energy to take on daily responsibilities.
- Stress has a huge impact on our lives and can make even day-to-day life difficult. Research shows that stress is closely linked to high blood pressure, heart disease and obesity. It also shows that people who feel depressed or chronically stressed may have a greater risk of physical illnesses.
- Living a healthy lifestyle may not be easy but can be achieved by gradually making small changes and building on those successes.

Resource: <http://www.mentalhealthamerica.net/may>

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Your mental health is more important than the test, the interview, the lunch date, the meeting, the family dinner, and the grocery-run. Take care of yourself.

HealthyPlace.com

# The Gut-Brain Connection

That gut-wrenching feeling in the pit of your stomach is all too real—your gut is sensitive to emotions like anger, anxiety, sadness, and joy—and your brain can react to signals from your stomach. All the more reason to eat a balanced and nutritious diet so that your gut and brain can be healthy.

What is “The Gut”? The gut includes every organ involved in digesting food and processing it into waste. The lining of your gut is often called “the second brain.” The gut or “second brain” can operate on its own and communicates back and forth with your actual brain. They are connected in two main ways:

Physically—The vagus nerve, which controls messages to the gut as well as the heart, lungs, and other vital organs is the gut’s direct connection to the brain.

Chemically—The gut also connects with the brain through chemicals like hormones and neurotransmitters that send messages.

The chemical messages that pass between the gut and the brain can be affected by the bacteria, viruses, and fungi that live in the gut called the “gut microbiome” and it may be beneficial, harmless, or harmful.

So, how is the gut microbiome related to mental health? There is a strong relationship between having mental health problems and having gastrointestinal symptoms like heartburn, indigestion, acid reflux, bloating, pain, constipation, and/or diarrhea. Additionally, research in animals has shown that changes in the gut microbiome and inflammation in the gut can affect the brain and cause symptoms that look like Parkinson’s disease, autism, anxiety and depression. Finally, having anxiety and depression can cause changes in the gut microbiome because of what happens in the body when it has stress response.

Eating a balanced and nutritious diet is the most important thing a person can do to keep their gut healthy. Eat a diet full of whole grains, lean meats, fish, fruits and vegetables. Don’t base your diet on sugary, fried, or processed foods and soft drinks. Feed the good bacteria, viruses, and fungi that live in the gut prebiotics. Prebiotic foods are high in fiber and work best when they are raw. Try asparagus, bananas (especially if they aren’t quite ripe), garlic, onions, or jicama. If you can’t stand the taste of these foods raw, you can try steaming them lightly to still get most of their prebiotic benefits. Tomatoes, apples, berries, and mangos are also good prebiotic choices.

You can also eat bacteria. Probiotics are live bacteria that exist in foods. Eating probiotics can be tricky. The types and amounts of bacteria in probiotics vary, and when foods are heated the bacteria often die. Examples of probiotic foods are yogurt (the label should say live or active cultures), unpasteurized sauerkraut and kimchi, miso soup, kefir (a yogurt-like beverage), kombucha (fermented black tea), tempeh (made of soy beans), and apple cider vinegar.

You can also get probiotic supplements to help grow good gut bacteria, but it is important to pick the right ones. Make sure the type of bacteria is listed on the bottle and that the label says that the bacteria are live and there are billions of colony forming units (CFUs). Store them in a cool, dry place like the refrigerator.

*Resource:* <http://www.mentalhealthamerica.net>



If you are taking steps to live a healthy lifestyle but still feel like you are struggling with your mental health, visit [www.mhascreening.org](http://www.mhascreening.org) to check your symptoms.



**FREE. CONFIDENTIAL. ANONYMOUS**

Once you have your results, we'll give you information and help you find tools and resources to feel better.

## Food Safety tips about

# lettuce

## Purchase:

- Select lettuces that are not bruised or damaged.
- "Ready-to-eat" produce should be refrigerated or surrounded by ice.
- While shopping keep fresh produce in your cart separate from household chemicals and raw foods such as meat, poultry and seafood.
- Ensure that fresh produce is bagged separately at checkout.

## Store:

- Promptly refrigerate.
- Store separately from raw meat, poultry or seafood or their juices.
- Do not allow raw meat, poultry or seafood juices to drip onto the packaging.

## Prepare:

- Thoroughly wash hands for 20 seconds with warm water and soap before and after preparing fresh produce.
- Wash cutting boards, dishes, utensils, sinks and countertops with hot water.
- Cut away any damaged or bruised areas on lettuce before preparing and/or eating. Produce that looks rotten or moldy should be discarded.
- Discard ready-to-eat produce that has touched raw meat, poultry, or seafood.
- Store uneaten produce in the refrigerator or discard



DINNER  
TONIGHT  
TEAS A&M AGRILIFE EXTENSION

Adapted from Clemson Cooperative Extension's Safe Handling of Lettuce and Leafy Greens



## Eat Your Spinach

Popeye was right—eating spinach improves your health. Now, it may not give you instant muscles, but it will give you a boost in vitamins and nutrients. The Dietary Guidelines for Americans recommends consuming at least 1 1/2 cups of dark green vegetables per week.

Spinach is available all year round but spring is peak season. You can eat spinach raw or cooked, but due to spinach's high water content, cooked spinach has a higher nutritional value than raw. You can store fresh spinach in your refrigerator for up to 5-7 days.

Spinach is a great leafy green to incorporate into your diet, but you do need to be careful if you are taking a blood thinning medication like Warfarin or Coumadin. Dark leafy greens have high Vitamin K content and may interfere with these medications. So talk to your doctor or registered dietitian nutritionist for more information.

## Is Your Favorite Recipe Healthy (or Not?)

If you want to enjoy a healthier lifestyle, cooking at home is a great place to start. But how can you be sure the recipes you find online—or that your own go-to recipes—are healthy? Follow these tips:

**Look for veggies**—Search for vegetarian recipes that are loaded with all different types and colors of vegetables. (You can always add a side of grilled chicken or fish if you want meat with the meal.)

**Use whole grains**—Think beyond white rice. Try brown rice, quinoa, farro, spelt berries, and whole wheat or whole grain pasta or flour. Explore the ancient grains. They have a wonderful flavor.

**Substitute pasta**—In place of high-starch pasta dishes, look for recipes that feature alternatives like spaghetti squash or zucchini noodles. Or try bean-based pastas—they're loaded with fiber and protein.

**Bake, don't fry**—Avoid recipes that call for breading and frying. Baking is preferable.

**Slash the sugar**—You can typically cut sugar by one-third to one-half of what is called for in a muffin or breakfast bread recipe.

**Reduce the oil**—Start with less oil than the recipe calls for, or sauté using low-sodium broth or water instead.

**Cut the salt**—Look for recipes that use lots of herbs and spices. This will bring in wonderful flavor without adding sodium.

**Limit the cheese**—Don't ruin your wonderful vegetable baked by loading it up with cheese. Cut the amount in half and you'll still enjoy a cheesy flavor.

**Choose dark greens**—Choose salad recipes calling for dark, leafy greens (spinach, mixed greens, arugula, kale) instead of iceberg lettuce.

**Try meatless**—Explore bean or lentil recipes in place of meat. You'll be surprised to discover how satisfying a [spicy black bean burger](#) can be.

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## Nutrition Facts

4 servings per container  
Serving size 1 quesadilla  
(259g)

Amount per serving  
**Calories 230**

	% Daily Value*
<b>Total Fat</b> 7g	9%
Saturated Fat 3g	15%
Trans Fat 0g	
<b>Cholesterol</b> 10mg	3%
<b>Sodium</b> 370mg	16%
<b>Total Carbohydrate</b> 32g	12%
Dietary Fiber 4g	14%
Total Sugars 1g	
Includes 0g Added Sugars	0%
<b>Protein</b> 13g	
Vitamin D 0mcg	0%
Calcium 561mg	45%
Iron 6mg	35%
Potassium 1070mg	25%

\*The % Daily Value tells you how much a nutrient in a serving of food contributes to a daily diet. 2,000 calories a day is used for general nutrition advice.

### Ingredients:

- 1 1/2 pounds fresh spinach
- 1 teaspoon canola oil
- 8 corn tortillas (6 or 7-inch)
- 1/4 cup salsa, drained
- 3/4 cup reduced-fat shredded Monterey jack cheese



### Directions:

Place spinach in colander in sink and run water over the greens. Drain and pat dry. Chop the washed spinach. Add canola oil to skillet and sauté fresh spinach quickly over medium heat until soft. Place 4 tortillas on a clean work surface. Spread half of the 3/4 cup cheese evenly on each tortilla. Top the cheese with 1 Tablespoon salsa, followed by 1/4 cup of cooked spinach. Evenly spread remaining cheese on top of the spinach on each tortilla. Top with remaining tortillas and press firmly. Cook each quesadilla in skillet over medium heat until cheese melts and tortillas are golden brown, about 3 minutes per side.

County Website: <http://tomgreen.agrilife.org/fch/>  
Facebook: <https://www.facebook.com/TomGreenCountyFCH/>

## *Tom Green County News*

### Tom Green EEA Spring Gathering

#### Veribest & Association Club Meeting

Tuesday, May 8, 2018 @ 10:30

@ Main Street Café

⇒ Applications are being accepted for the **Tom Green Extension Education Association Scholarship (\$300.00)** for Fall, 2018. Applicants need to be a Tom Green County resident, have been a 4-H member and planning to attend a State University, Junior College or Technical School. Applications are available from the County Extension office and are due back to our office by **June 1, 2018**

Family and Community Health “Connections” is provided by the following

AgriLife Extension

Family and Community Health Agents:

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