

News & Comments

Probiotics can Help Tackle Depression – Study Suggests

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Effects of antidepressants can be enhanced by probiotics to help alleviate depression symptoms.

Probiotics are often known as the 'good bacteria', are claimed to have many health benefits, and now it has shown a positive role in alleviating depression - a pretty widespread problem. As per an estimate by the CDC, in 2019, 18.5% of adults in the USA suffer from depression.

For establishing the link between probiotics and depression, researchers studied 47 volunteers, suffering from depression, in a 4 week-long study. They noticed a greater improvement in Participants who took probiotic supplements with antidepressants.

Moreover, probiotics also affected intestinal flora, causing an increase in lactic acid-producing bacteria.

The microbiome-gut-brain axis is a known subject, but the exact mechanisms involved in it are still unknown. Since various brain regions process information differently, in people with depression, facial expressions are often used to measure those differences, therefore, the researchers used fMRI scans to observe participants' responses to fearful or neutral faces. It transpired that for those who took probiotics the brain processes normalized, which signals the positive effect of probiotics on different facets of depression.

The researchers who conducted this study emphasized that "the probiotics wouldn't work as a treatment on their own, without the antidepressants". The sample size of the study was small, so more research is needed to observe, the effects of different types of bacteria on larger populations.

One may yet discover that probiotics play a role in tailoring and enhancing treatment.

"As more information about the specific effects of different bacteria becomes available, it may be possible to optimize bacteria selection and use the best mix for depression treatment," says psychiatrist Anna-Chiara Schaub from the University of Base l in Switzerland.

KEYWORDS

Depression, Molecular neuroscience, Physiology, brain research, depression, digestive symptoms, gut bacteria, gut-brain axis, mental health, microbiome, microbiota

