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An Age-Old Concept in Modern Veterinary Practice

The microbiome and central nervous system connection has recently attracted significant attention. The influence of bacteria on our emotions, cognition, and behavior has led to recognition of the microbiota–gut–brain axis, based on the premise that gastrointestinal bacteria secrete neuroactive substances, including neurotransmitters, short-chain fatty acids, and amino acids.

Related therapeutics such as fecal transplants have been used in traditional Chinese medicine since the Dong Jin dynasty and in Ancient Greece. However, it was not until the 19th century, when physicians adopted a more holistic approach to human health, that some began to blame the gut for influencing mental health. In 1887, German and French physicians linked the presence of gut bacteria to autointoxication. It was believed that if toxins produced during digestion were not evacuated from the body early enough, they would lead to central nervous system poisoning. By the 20th century, this holistic approach to gastrointestinal research had been reversed. Peter Dally, a British psychiatrist, postulated that all patients with gastrointestinal symptoms without any organic cause should be diagnosed with mental illness. From this time point, many functional gastrointestinal disturbances were thought to be associated with “psychological distress.”

Now, however, the microbiome appears to be a promising therapeutic target. This connection is reviewed in this issue’s [“Role of the Microbiota–Gut–Brain Axis in Behavioral and Neurologic Disorders”](#) (p. 46). Recognizing its long history helps us see this as more than a trend—it’s a move toward a more holistic understanding of animal health, supported by modern molecular techniques.

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