

1 **Boosting morale**

2 original at

3 <http://www.economist.com/node/21528214>

4 A typical person is, from a microbiologist's perspective, a walking, talking
5 Petri dish. An extraordinary profusion of microscopic critters inhabit every
6 crack and crevice of the typical human, so many that they probably
7 outnumber the cells of the body upon and within which they dwell.

8 Happily, these microbes are mostly harmless. Some of them, particularly
9 those that live in the gut, are positively beneficial, helping with digestion
10 and keeping the intestines in good working order. That is no surprise—
11 bacteria as much as people have an interest in keeping their homes in
12 sound condition. What is surprising is the small but growing body of
13 evidence which suggests that bacteria dwelling in the gut can affect the
14 brain, too, and thereby influence an individual's mood and behaviour. In a
15 recent paper on the topic, scientists report on the results in mice on which
16 they have tested the theory.

17 The researchers split their rodent subjects into two groups. One lot were
18 fed a special broth containing *Lactobacillus rhamnosus*, a gut-dwelling
19 bacterium often found in yogurt and other dairy products. The others were
20 fed an ordinary diet, not fortified with microbes.

21 The team then subjected the mice to a battery of tests that are used
22 routinely to measure the emotional states of rodents. Most (though not
23 all) of these tests showed significant differences between the two groups
24 of animals: animals fed *Lactobacillus*-enriched diet performed better.

25 Is something similar going on in people? A few previous studies have
26 hinted at the possibility. This suggests that one day, bacterial treatments
27 could help with the mental symptoms of some illnesses.

Questions

- 1) What do, according to the article, humans and Petri dishes have in common?
- 2) The bacteria inhabiting the human gut have been known for a long time to help their host. In what way?
- 3) Recent research has indicated gut bacteria can also have what type of positive effects on their host?
- 4) What animals did the scientist use for their experiments?
- 5) What were the results of the experiments?
- 6) Does the article suggest that principles similar to those governing the reactions of the tested animals may apply to human beings? What practical applications could the knowledge gained through the experiments on the animals have?
- 7) What is your opinion on scientific experiments on animals? Do you think this is something necessary for the biological sciences, or is it all just needless cruelty?
- 8) Have you ever observed any sort of interaction between what goes on in your gut and in your brain?

Vocabulary

profusion (line 5) – abundance, a great quantity

gut (line 9) – the alimentary canal; the belly; stomach; abdomen

dwelling (line 13) – to live or stay as a permanent resident; reside.

treatment (line 26) – the activity aimed at dealing with (a disease, patient, etc.) in order to relieve or cure.

You can find additional explanation and more examples to help you understand and use English words and phrases at <http://dictionary.reference.com>, <http://dictionary.cambridge.org/>, <http://www.merriam-webster.com/> or <http://www.ldoceonline.com/>

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