



Linda's T'ai Chi

Weekly Handout May 24, 2020

Welcome to your Gut- the Second Brain

During our classes I often reference how performing T'ai Chi, and its sister forms, Shibashi, and Qigong calm the brain and connect the mind, body and spirit. I also reference calming the gut. In one of our qigong exercises, the 5 Animal Frolic, we perform "the Bear" which is designed to both honor and calm the gut. But, why? Why the gut? Why not other systems of the body? The gut is a unique system in our body. Welcome to your gut- your second brain.

I have been asked if the reference to the gut as the second brain is a residual reference to traditional chinese medicine or our earlier understanding of the body and disease or is it based in the science of today's understanding of how our bodies work. It is both. From the T'ai Chi perspective, the lower dantien is thought to be the first and original source of all energy (Qi) in the body. Not surprising the lower dantien is located about 2 inches below the belly button, right in the middle of the gut. Today, scientists and researches recognize the gut as a separate system because the gut functions independently from the brain and the spinal cord and thus is referred to the second brain.

The Father of Medicine, Hippocrates believed all disease began in the gut. Well, he was not exactly correct but he did seem to understand the important relationship between all systems of the body and the gut.

We often experience our stress in our guts. During this very stressful time of Covid 19, economic, employment and political uncertainty you may have experienced stomach or gut distress. You are not alone. The gut reacts to stressful situations in many ways. Each of us has probably experienced the kinds of distress we feel when we are under acute or prolonged stress. The NIH of Diabetes, Digestive and Kidney Disease in the US estimates that 60 to 70 million people in the US have a digestive disorder. And, that was before Covid 19.

The gut is the only system in the body that acts independently from the brain and the spinal cord, thus, the second brain. The gut and the brain are in constant communication with each other. This helps explain why, when we eat something that makes us sick, we instinctively via the gut to the brain avoid the food and even the place

we found it. The enteric nervous system (digestive system) is an extensive network that uses the same chemicals and cells as the brain that help us to digest our food and to alert the brain when something is not quite right. Ever have the butterflies? Queasy feeling in your stomach? That is your gut letting you know something is not right.

According to Michael Gershon, chairman of the Department of Anatomy and Cell Biology at New York–Presbyterian Hospital/Columbia University Medical Center, and an expert in the nascent field of neurogastroenterology and author of the 1998 book *The Second Brain* (HarperCollins), the gut is equipped with its own reflexes and senses, and functions independently of the brain.

Research conducted by Dr. Emeran A. Mayer, UCLA, suggests a relationship between emotional health and gut health. “The second brain informs our state of mind in other more obscure ways. A big part of our emotions are probably influenced by the nerves in our gut, he says. Up to 90 percent of the cells involved in these responses carry information to the brain rather than receiving messages from it, making our gut as influential to our mood as our head is. It will be interesting to follow the research on mental illness, treatment, emotional wellbeing and the health of the gut as well as the relationship between the immune system and the gut.

For us, one of the goals of performing T'ai Chi, Shibashi and other qigong exercises is to calm the brain and all of our systems within the body. Calming the mind also calms the gut. This is important for our overall health and wellbeing.

Now, take a deep belly breath- inhale and exhale very slowly. Do this again. And, one more time. Let your body soften with each exhale to increase your sense of wellbeing and to give your systems a break from the stress of the moment. One more deep belly breath. Now, don't' you feel a little better?

Be SANE

Take this Seriously and be Safe

Stay Active

Be Neighborly

Stay Engaged.



Peace, Linda