

Suppers Book Review: Gut and Psychology Syndrome by Natasha Campbell-McBride

Book Summary

This book summary was prepared for the Suppers Programs audience. Our programs reach out to people with health challenges related to blood sugar regulation and mood chemistry. This includes people who are challenged by depression, anxiety, learning issues, obesity, diabetes, and problems with alcohol. Our starting assumption is borrowed from a holistic medical model that states that the diagnosis or name of a disease is inconsequential compared to identification of the biochemical and environmental causes of the problem. So, for example, people with ADHD are functionally related to alcoholics or diabetics if their problems are at least partly caused by consuming highly refined, flavor enhanced, artificially sweetened or otherwise processed food. Suppers makes no medical recommendations, but we do read books by medical professionals to support each other's and our own journey to better health. If you have health and/or mental health challenges AND you have a strong relationship with non-whole foods like candy, cake, chips, bread or pasta, soda (diet or regular) or caffeine drinks, this book may be for you.

In "**GAPS**", Natasha Campbell-McBride, M.D. examines the relationship between digestive problems and brain effects, a relationship she sees in virtually all of her patients, from children with autism to allergies to asthma. The brain is functionally "downstream" from the gut. In other words, the target for her treatment of a child with ADHD or autism and digestive issues is the gut. This is because certain foods and substances passing through a compromised digestive tract produce substances that travel to the brain, alter mood chemistry, and kill brain cells. A familiar example is provided by the foods we call comfort foods -- often including a combination of starches, sugars, and fats -- that literally change one's mood. What seems modestly comforting to a healthy person can produce intense, drug-like effects in someone whose digestion is compromised.

GAPS is written for people dealing with some combination of ADD, ADHD, behavioral problems, dyspraxia (extreme clumsiness), dyslexia, allergies, asthma, and/or autism. The wide range reflects roots in common biochemical and environmental causes that express differently in different individuals. In all instances, Dr. Campbell-McBride points to the shared roots in modern challenges to our immune systems, including: overuse of antibiotics, habitual eating of foods that cause opiate-like effects, insufficient fiber in the diet, overconsumption of sugary and starchy foods that feed pathological organisms in the gut, destruction of beneficial gut flora, and certain vaccines that have been found to sequester in the guts of vulnerable children. In addition to antibiotics, other drugs can take a toll on the digestive tract, including: pain killers like ibuprofen, steroids, contraceptive pills, sleeping pills, and heartburn pills. Physical indications that one's use of pharmaceuticals may be involved in one's gut-related brain effects include fungal infections, bloating, diarrhea, foul gas, etc. The problems can start in infancy with bottle feeding which results in undesirable forms of gut flora developing. And what's more, mothers who breastfeed can pass undesirable flora on to their babies. Campbell-McBride interprets this transfer from generation to generation as one of the explanations for the culture-wide compromise of immunity which manifests as an assortment of allergies, brain deficits, asthma, etc., problems that are all on the rise.

Of particular interest to our Suppers audiences is the opiate -- or morphine-like -- effect of eating foods made from gluten grains (wheat, rye, barley) and dairy products. When these proteins are not thoroughly broken down during digestion, the resulting particles reach the brain in a form that can have anything from a mild comfort effect to an intense drug-like effect.

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The therapeutic diet excludes grains and high starch vegetables like yams and potatoes. It excludes all processed fats, sugars and other refined foods, dairy products, starchy beans and all food additives. It emphasizes low starch/high fiber vegetables, fruits, nuts, seeds, meat, and eggs. The same foods that heal the digestive tract are also very stabilizing for blood sugar and mood chemistry. In fact, according to Campbell-McBride, "It has been proven that a lot of hyperactivity, inability to concentrate and learn, aggression and other behavioral abnormalities in school children are a direct result of this glucose rollercoaster."

Hydrogenated fats – the kind we eat in processed foods -- are also immune suppressing. Briefly, when a vegetable oil is heated, it retains enough similarity to the fat's original structure that the body can use these fats to make cells, but the fats do not serve the cells as well as the naturally occurring, unheated, fats and functionally disable cells. She recommends cooking with animal fats like butter or duck fat. They do not change their chemical structure with cooking. She suggests using pure, cold pressed vegetable oils like extra virgin olive oil for flavoring *after* the food is done cooking.

The essential fats are those we must consume because we have to have them but our bodies can't produce them. They are the omega 3 and omega 6 fats, and every cell in the human body needs them. If the body has enough of these, it can make all other fats from them. The dry weight of the human brain is about 60% fat. Cell membranes and many hormones and neurotransmitters are made of fats. There is no doubt fats are extremely important for health; the question is – which ones? The short answer is the fats that haven't been in any way processed. Hydrogenated fats are made from fats that have been heated at very high temperatures in the presence of heavy metals. The process increases shelf life. Unfortunately, the processing creates fats that interfere with the production of hormones, reduce the ability of insulin to respond to glucose, impair immunity, have damaging effects on livers and kidneys, and have been implicated in diabetes, atherosclerosis, cancer, neurological and psychiatric conditions.

Getting the balance of omega 3 and omega 6 fats right is challenging in this day and age because most of our diets are skewed toward the vegetable fats (omega 6) like safflower oil and away from the fish, seed and nut oils (omega 3), which are the best fats for brain development and immunity. In general she finds that people with health problems require a greater proportion of omega 3s.

Caution should be taken when purchasing oils to be sure they have not been heated or otherwise processed. When buying olive oil, be sure it says "cold pressed" and "virgin" on the label. And remember to not cook with olive oil. Add it after the cooking to avoid destroying the structure. Animal fats are the safest cooking oils. She emphasizes that GAPS children and adults require plenty of unprocessed fat in their diets because their brains and nervous systems need these fats to heal. People with brain differences, mood, learning, and behavior problems should feel free to consume the skin on their chicken and salads rich in oils. It will reduce cravings for sweets and processed carbohydrates, the foods they must avoid in order to get well.

Comments

The Suppers program menu reflects restrictions and recommendations that are very close, though not as strict, as those outlined in GAPS. This is not because we think that everybody needs to be on such a strict plan but because people don't need help learning to cook or eating the stuff that's convenient and fast. It's very easy to grab bread, cheese, cookies, and canned soup. People don't need help learning how to prepare or eat these foods. Suppers teaches how to prepare whole food from scratch and provides support while your taste buds develop and you actually prefer whole foods.