



NuWELL

Health



# **Body to Mind: Physical Wellness and Mental Health**

**“Enhancing mental wellness through targeted natural health strategies.”**



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# Foreward

By Stephen A. Luther, MEd, MEd, LPC

***I want to first thank you for taking a few moments to review this material and for allowing us to invest in your healing journey. I am a Licensed Professional Counselor with over 20 years of experience working with clients suffering from various mental health conditions. I founded a local counseling practice in Western PA in 2009, which has grown to have over 60 counselors and provides services in multiple states.***

The longer I practiced, the more I saw that working with people's minds wasn't enough, as often issues in their physical health were keeping them stuck and unable to break free. On top of that, it became clear that they weren't getting what they needed from traditional medical care, which usually just medicated the symptoms. This prompted me to gather a fantastic group of practitioners here at NuWell Health to identify the root causes in the body that affect the mind.

## My Journey

Throughout my years as a clinical counselor, I became convinced that it is virtually impossible to have mental health issues and not have them cause significant issues in the body. Conversely, I have found that any significant and prolonged physical health issues are going to erode a person's mental health. I've seen this over and over again with my clients, but perhaps the clearest example I have seen is with my own health journey. During years of high stress both at home and at work, I developed several chronic health issues such as adrenal fatigue, brain fog, insulin resistance, inflammation, gut issues, and chronic pain. These issues then led to significant problems with my mental health, including anxiety, depression, and irritability.

As I was able to get the stress resolved, I began to feel more alive, but that only went so far. I was stuck with this pattern of mental and physical struggles that didn't go away simply because the initial cause was removed. I felt hopeless and even resigned to a life of chronic health issues. I then realized that getting the physical health symptoms associated with this pattern was essential to fully healing and being set free.

As a counselor, I was trained to focus on my mental health but nothing I did worked as long as the physical symptoms remained. I have since made great progress with my physical health, with the associated improvement of my mental health.

## The Mind-Body Connection

My personal and professional experiences underscore a fundamental truth: the mind and body are interconnected systems, where each profoundly influences the other. As I navigated my own health challenges, I observed how chronic stress and physical ailments like adrenal fatigue and gut issues fueled my mental health struggles, including anxiety and depression. This mirrors what I've seen in countless clients—mental health issues often have roots in physical imbalances, and untreated physical conditions can erode emotional resilience over time.

Science supports this holistic perspective. Research indicates that physical health has a direct impact on mental well-being through mechanisms such as neurotransmitter regulation. For instance, deficiencies in nutrients such as vitamin B12, magnesium, and omega-3 fatty acids—found in foods like salmon, almonds, and flaxseeds—can disrupt serotonin production, a key mood stabilizer, leading to symptoms of depression and anxiety (Clay, 2023; Cleveland Clinic, 2022).

Similarly, chronic inflammation from a poor diet or stress can cross the blood-brain barrier, exacerbating mental health challenges (Hopper et al., 2019). This bidirectional relationship suggests that addressing physical health is not just complementary to mental health care—it's essential for lasting change.

At NuWell Health, we embrace this mind-body connection as the foundation of our approach to healing. By integrating insights from nutrition, stress management, and gut health, we aim to uncover and treat the physical roots that often underlie mental health struggles, offering a more comprehensive path to healing than traditional therapy or medication alone can provide.



## An Invitation

As you reflect on the insights shared in this eBook, I invite you to join us at NuWell Health on a transformative healing journey that honors the connection between your mind and body. Our team is here to guide you with personalized strategies tailored to your unique needs. Whatever physical and emotional issues you are struggling with, we believe that addressing both mental and physical health can unlock the resilience you deserve.

At NuWell Health, we're committed to walking alongside you, providing evidence-based tools and support to break cycles of struggle and foster lasting progress. Visit <https://nuwellhealth.org/> to schedule a free consultation, and let's work together to cultivate a path to wellness that integrates your whole self. Your journey to healing starts now—let's take it step by step.

## References

Clay, R. A. (2023, June). Nutrition for mental health: How diet can help with depression. *Monitor on Psychology*. <https://www.apa.org/monitor/2023/06/nutrition-for-mental-health-depression>

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# Chapter 1:

## Fueling Your Mind Through Nutrition and Exercise

By Jaclyn Rathbun, CFNC

Food is one of the basic building blocks of life and health, along with water, air, and sunshine. Our bodies can't function without it. But eating is not just about survival or satisfying hunger—it's about nourishing our bodies and helping them function at their best. When we don't provide the right nutrients, things start to go haywire, and we begin feeling “off” physically, mentally, and emotionally.

The modern Western diet is dominated by processed, nutrient-poor foods loaded with inflammatory fats and refined carbohydrates. While these foods may stave off hunger, they fail to provide the vitamins, minerals, protein, and healthy fats required for proper biological function. Worse, they actively contribute to chronic disease—such as diabetes, heart disease, and autoimmune disorders—and are linked to mood disorders including depression, anxiety, bipolar disorder, and ADHD.

### Nutrition and Neurotransmitters

One reason nutrition is so critical to mental health is its influence on neurotransmitters, the body's chemical messengers. For instance, serotonin, known as the “feel-good” chemical, plays a role in learning, memory, and happiness as well as regulating body temperature, sleep, sexual behavior and hunger. Imbalances in serotonin are associated with depression, anxiety, fibromyalgia, and chronic pain (Cleveland Clinic, 2022). To produce serotonin, the body requires specific nutrients—including B vitamins, calcium, and copper (Clay, 2023). Without adequate intake, serotonin levels drop and mood suffers.

Fortunately, the solution is straightforward: just eat real food – not fast food, not packaged and processed food, but whole, healthy, natural foods. Beef, pork, fish, dairy, eggs, lentils, leafy greens, nuts, seeds, and even dark chocolate provide the nutrient building blocks for serotonin. Many of these foods are also rich in vitamins B6, B9, B12, magnesium, and iron—nutrients tied to mood stability and emotional resilience. Likewise, omega-3 fatty acids, found in salmon, sardines, mackerel, flaxseeds, and walnuts, play a key role in reducing inflammation and supporting brain health. Adequate protein intake, sourced from quality animal and plant foods, supplies the amino acids required to build neurotransmitters.

**Table: Nutrient Deficiencies, Mental Health Links, and Food Sources**

<b>Nutrient Deficiency</b>	<b>Mental Health Disorders</b>	<b>Top 3 food sources</b>
<b>Vitamin B12</b>	depressed, cognitive decline, dementia, psychosis (in severe cases)	clams, beef liver, salmon
<b>Vitamin D</b>	depression, seasonal affective	salmon, fortified milk, egg yolks
<b>Iron</b>	depression, anxiety, fatigue related mood changes, ADHD-like symptoms	lean red meat, lentils, spinach
<b>Magnesium</b>	depression, anxiety, irritability, stress sensitivity	pumpkin seeds, almonds, spinach
<b>Tryptophan (amino acid)</b>	depression, anxiety, insomnia	turkey, tofu, pumpkin seeds

## Exercise and Mental Health

Good nutrition is clearly foundational for good health but it is only part of the equation. Exercise also has profound benefits for both body and mind. Research shows that physical activity alters brain chemistry, increases serotonin and endorphins, and reduces stress hormones. It improves sleep quality, boosts self-esteem, provides healthy distraction from negative thoughts, and can ease muscle tension and irritability (Better Health Channel, n.d.). Beyond cardiovascular and musculoskeletal health, exercise is one of the most effective strategies for improving mood and overall mental wellness.

### Case Study

As a Functional Nutrition Coach, I saw this firsthand with a client, a woman struggling with depression, migraines, digestive distress, and difficulty losing weight. She had several food sensitivities including dairy, gluten, eggs, and soy but was not careful about avoiding them mainly because she ate a majority of her meals out. I encouraged her to start eating at home where she could control the ingredients and quality of her food.

Together, we developed a simple menu of soups, smoothies, and other nutrient-dense, easy-to-digest meals she could prepare at home. I also recommended targeted supplements, early morning sunlight, trauma-release therapy, and gentle daily movement.

Within weeks, she reported fewer headaches, less stomach pain, and even significant improvement in her depression symptoms. She began enjoying social activities again, walking outside, and even traveling with her family—things she previously avoided. This progress highlights the power of combining personalized nutrition with lifestyle strategies to support both mental and physical healing.

### Individualized Care

Every client's story is different. While all clients begin with the removal of inflammatory, nutrient-deficient foods and the addition of whole, nutrient-rich options, the specifics vary by individual. Clearing the “muddy waters” of poor nutrition allows us to identify deeper root causes, such as hormone imbalances and gut dysfunction, and build sustainable health strategies.

One practical tool is the Food, Mood, and Exercise Tracker, which helps clients connect dietary and activity patterns with changes in mood and physical well-being. You can see below for this tool now and begin logging your daily food intake, exercise, and any mental and physical symptoms you experience and, over time, start to connect the dots for yourself.

While self-tracking is valuable, professional guidance ensures patterns are recognized and addressed effectively. At NuWell Health, we work alongside clients to create personalized plans that address both mental and physical health. If you are struggling, our team can help you find the nutritional and lifestyle strategies that support your unique path to wellness.

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Cleveland Clinic. (2022, December 12). Serotonin: What it is, function & levels. Cleveland Clinic. <https://my.clevelandclinic.org/health/articles/22572-serotonin>

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# Chapter 2:

## Balancing Hormones and Stress for Mental Clarity

By Dr. Jennifer Hampton, ND

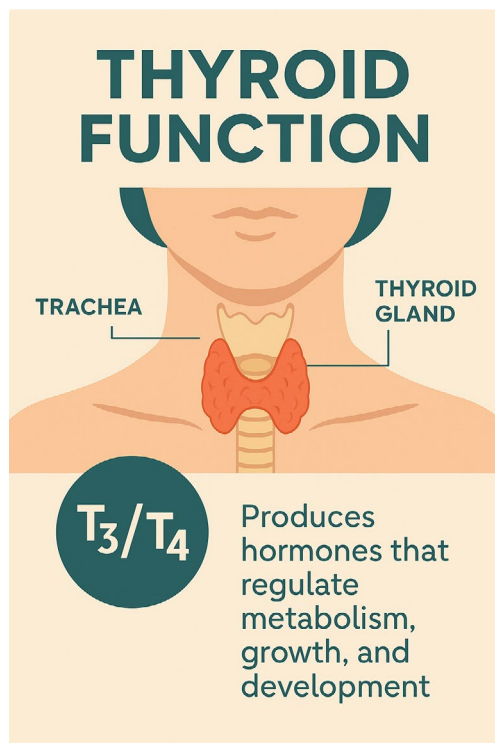
***I feel off, are my hormones out of balance? Could my hormones be causing my mood? Should I have my hormone levels tested?*** In my practice as a naturopathic doctor, I am often asked about hormones. People come to me curious about how hormones are affecting their daily life, wondering what they can do to assess and improve their hormone balance. And it's not specific to my patients or even just the natural health community. Concerns about the impact of hormones on physical and mental health are on the rise. Google searches for terms like "hormone health" and "hormone imbalance," have been increasing over the past five years. Social media abounds with advice and claims on how to balance your hormones and improve your weight/energy/sleep/mood... you name it! But what exactly are hormones? Are they worth the hype?

Hormones are messengers. Each hormone has a specific chemical structure that carries information from one part of the body to another. Special glands make hormones in response to the body's needs and send them into the blood. In the blood, they travel to target cells to tell them what to do. Think of hormones like tiny text messages with instructions that help control things like growth, energy, mood, or even how your body handles food and stress. Hormones connect our body systems much like language helps people to connect with each other, allowing for collaboration within our body. Because of their systemic effects, when taking a holistic approach to mental health, hormones play a vital role.

Hormones can be categorized by their actions and their biochemical structure. Often, the word "hormone" conjures up thoughts of puberty, the menstrual cycle, or sexuality but this is just one type of hormone category known as sex hormones. They include estrogen, progesterone, and testosterone. While they certainly do regulate reproductive processes, these chemicals have powerful effects across the entire body including the brain, gut, and muscle. For instance, they interact with brain chemicals like serotonin and dopamine to stabilize mood, reduce stress responses, and enhance cognitive sharpness. When sex hormones get out of balance—due to stress, lifestyle choices, or life stages like menopause—it can show up as symptoms like irregular periods, low libido, mood swings, insomnia, fatigue or even increased risks for chronic diseases like osteoporosis, diabetes, and heart issues.

Thyroid hormone is also gaining in recognition. It is made by the thyroid gland. Do you know where that is? It's a small, but mighty, butterfly shaped gland that sits in the throat. Thyroid hormone goes from the thyroid gland out to every cell in the body and regulates metabolism--which is a fancy way of saying how a cell obtains energy to get things done! Because of thyroid hormone's influence on metabolism, a deficiency in thyroid hormone can lead to fatigue, weight gain, constipation, infertility, depression and much more. An excess of thyroid hormone is also problematic. Sometimes excess thyroid hormone triggers similar systems to low thyroid but often causes someone to feel "amped up," as they struggle with restlessness, weight loss, diarrhea, and anxiety.

## Thyroid Functionality



The thyroid gland is a small, butterfly-shaped endocrine gland located in the front of the neck, just below the Adam's apple.

It produces hormones like thyroxine (T<sub>4</sub>) and triiodothyronine (T<sub>3</sub>), which regulate metabolism, energy use, growth, and body temperature. It also secretes calcitonin to help control calcium levels.

Weighing about 20-30 grams in adults, the gland relies on iodine from the diet to make these hormones. Common issues include hypothyroidism (underactive), hyperthyroidism (overactive), or goiter (enlarged thyroid).

## A look at how thyroid hormone impacts everyday symptoms

Symptom	Low Thyroid	High Thyroid
Energy & Mood	Tiredness, Depression	Anxiety, Irritability
Weight	Weight Gain	Weight Loss
Temperature	Feel Cold	Feeling hot, sweating
Heart Rate	Slow	Fast, palpitation
Bowel Movements	Constipation	Diarrhea
Skin / Hair	Dry skin, hair loss	Thin skin, hair loss

Another key hormone that demonstrates the relationship between physical and mental wellbeing is cortisol. This hormone is key to our chronic stress response, inflammation, and sleep-wake cycle among many other functions. Cortisol helps us get up and go every morning as well as endure long-term stress. It is made by the adrenal glands—critical hormone glands that many people have never thought about. The adrenal glands rest right on top of your kidneys. Pat your mid-back on either side of your spine and you will find them. Maybe give them an extra pat on the back – they deserve it for all the stress they put up with in our modern lives! That being said, long-term stress can result in health consequences related to high cortisol as well as issues related to low cortisol when our chronic stress response burns out. These symptoms include issues with weight, sleep, energy, blood pressure, blood sugar, and mood.

Ok, so we are just scratching the surface of what hormones are and how they work. There are many others you may have heard of that we have not even begun to cover – like melatonin or Vitamin D or insulin or GLP-1. Yes, those are all hormones too. For now, let's tune into some practical applications.

First, hopefully you now understand that hormones are key to holistic wellbeing because they allow the different parts of our body to communicate and act as an integrated whole. Hormones are not contained well by diagnostic categories or medical specialties based on organ systems (like heart, brain, or gut) – they are everywhere! Thus, hormone imbalances have a wide impact throughout the body and can be an underlying cause for many bothersome symptoms. These symptoms often overlap with symptoms of mental health diagnoses, so whenever facing mental health challenges it is essential to consider the role of hormones. Until any underlying hormone problems are addressed, mental health treatments will only be partially successful at best.

This is where testing hormone levels comes into play. Some of these imbalances are clinical conditions that can be treated medically – such as low thyroid known in medicine as hypothyroidism. Others are what are called “functional” imbalances, meaning the hormones are considered clinically “normal” lab values but they are not optimal for functionality. As a naturopathic doctor, I work with people to explore their options for hormone testing either in collaboration with their medical providers or through specialty lab companies. I use the labs to educate my patients about their health, taking extra time to make sure they understand what labs were run and why. Armed with information found in these lab values, patients can better understand their bodies, develop a plan to support their hormones, and begin to see change in symptoms that felt stagnant.

The good news about hormone health is you don't always have to take medications or even supplements to see improvements. There are many more tools available to support your body's hormone balance. For example, people often think that the solution to their low testosterone is to simply start testosterone injections. However, research has shown that exercise naturally raises testosterone, and for some this exactly where they need to begin.

Source: Riachy et al., *Journal of Functional Morphology and Kinesiology* (2020).

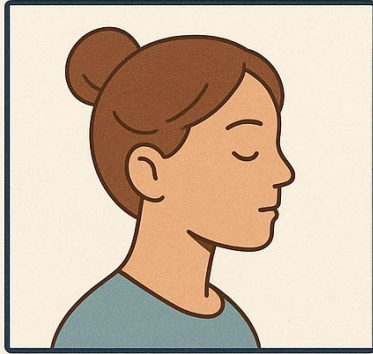
Though there is a time and a place for medical therapies –such as when lab values reveal a clinical diagnosis-- simple lifestyle changes go a long way towards your body's natural regulation of these important messengers.

One accessible tool is breathing. Breath exercises have been shown to promote regulation of stress, even impacting the hormone cortisol.

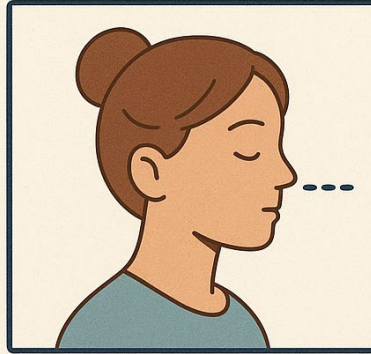
Source: Ma et al., *Frontiers in Psychology* (2017).

One breathing tool I like to use personally and with my patients is called four-square breathing or box breathing. It divides the breath into four parts—inhale, hold, exhale hold—and each part is held for four seconds. Take a moment to try it with me. Inhale – one, two, three, four. Hold – one, two, three, four. Exhale – one, two, three, four. Hold – one, two, three, four. Let's repeat that for another minute or two. You just helped lower your stress!

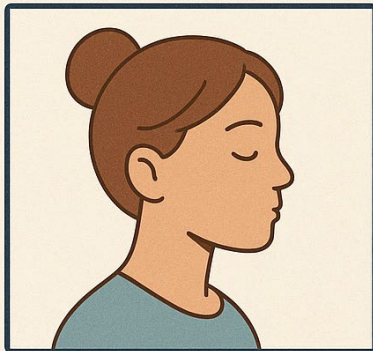
## FOUR SQUARE BREATHING



**INHALE 4**



**HOLD 4**



**EXHALE 4**



**HOLD 4**

Hormones highlight that there are physical roots to our mental-emotional experience. Tending to these roots can produce great fruit in our ability to work through our daily challenges. It also may reveal that what we thought was a mental health problem may in fact require physical support first before the mental-emotional experience changes. Ideally, we tend to both mind and body together, for truly there is no separation but one integrated whole.

Naturopathic care and health coaching can be just the place to explore your hormones levels and their impact on your mental health. By working with the Nuwell team, you will receive a thorough health analysis that includes investigating your hormones. Together you and the team will develop a customized plan for leveraging natural tools – food, exercise, supplements, and more—to restore balance and clarity of mind.

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American Thyroid Association – Thyroid Disease Overview

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**Ready for an action step today?**

**Take a minute to tune in to your body's experience of stress by taking our Stress Inventory Questionnaire.**

# Stress Inventory Questionnaire

This questionnaire evaluates your stress levels by assessing symptoms related to energy, sleep, digestion, and mood over the past month. Answer each question honestly to gauge your stress profile.

**Instructions:** For each symptom, select how often you've experienced it in the past month using the following scale:

- 0: Never
- 1: Rarely (once or twice)
- 2: Sometimes (weekly)
- 3: Often (several times a week)
- 4: Very Often (daily or almost daily)

Symptoms	Never	Rarely	Sometimes	Often	Very Often
1. Feeling fatigued or low energy despite	(0)	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
2. Difficulty falling asleep or staying asleep	[]	[]	[]	[]	[]
3. Waking up feeling unrefreshed or tired	[]	[]	[]	[]	[]
4. Digestive issues (e.g., bloating, stomach pain, diarrhea)	[]	[]	[]	[]	[]
5. Increased cravings for sugar or salty foods	[]	[]	[]	[]	[]
6. Feeling anxious or nervous	[]	[]	[]	[]	[]
7. Irritability or mood swings	[]	[]	[]	[]	[]
8. Low mood or feelings of sadness	[]	[]	[]	[]	[]
9. Difficulty concentrating or experiencing	[]	[]	[]	[]	[]
10. Feeling overwhelmed or unable to handle daily tasks	[]	[]	[]	[]	[]

## Scoring:

- Add up the numbers from all responses to calculate your total score.
- **Score Ranges:**
  - **0–10:** Low stress. Minimal stress-related symptoms.
  - **11–20:** Mild stress. Some symptoms may suggest a need for lifestyle changes.
  - **21–30:** Moderate stress. Frequent symptoms may indicate functional imbalances.
  - **31–40:** High stress. Significant symptoms suggest a need for professional evaluation.

## Notes:

- This questionnaire focuses on energy, sleep, digestion, and mood symptoms linked to stress and functional cortisol imbalances, as identified in research on HPA axis dysregulation [1, 2, 3].
- Symptoms may overlap with other conditions (e.g., thyroid disorders, depression). Consult a healthcare provider for a comprehensive evaluation, especially for moderate to high scores.
- Use this tool to track stress over time or to facilitate discussions with a healthcare professional.

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## Chapter 3: Healing Your Gut, Healing Your Mind

By Tracy Manno, IHP, CFNC, BARA, OPC

I'm Tracy, an Integrative Health Practitioner and Counselor at NuWell Health. With over 15 years as a pastor, counselor, and integrative health coach, I've guided many through the challenges of anxiety, emotional roadblocks, and chronic health issues. My own journey through debilitating health issues taught me a vital lesson: your gut plays a central role in your mental health.

Building upon Jackie and Jennifer's chapters that explored nutrition, exercise, stress and hormones, I'm going to discuss the role that your microbiome and digestive system directly plays in your mental wellness, and how the gut-brain connection can support your journey to feeling better.

### The Gut-Brain Axis

Your gut is more than a digestive system; it's often called your "second brain" because of its profound influence on your mental and emotional state. It is comprised not only of food processing functions (enzymes, hydrochloric acid, bile, liver, gallbladder, etc.), but also your microbiome—part of your body's comprehensive immune and neurological systems.

Through the gut-brain axis, your gut and brain are constantly exchanging signals in their efforts to maintain balance (homeostasis) throughout your body systems. Your microbiome—made up of trillions of microorganisms—produces essential neurotransmitters like serotonin, which regulates mood (90% is made in the gut), and dopamine, which drives motivation. When your gut is balanced, it supports emotional stability and mental clarity. When it's disrupted, the effects can amplify the struggles you're addressing in therapy.

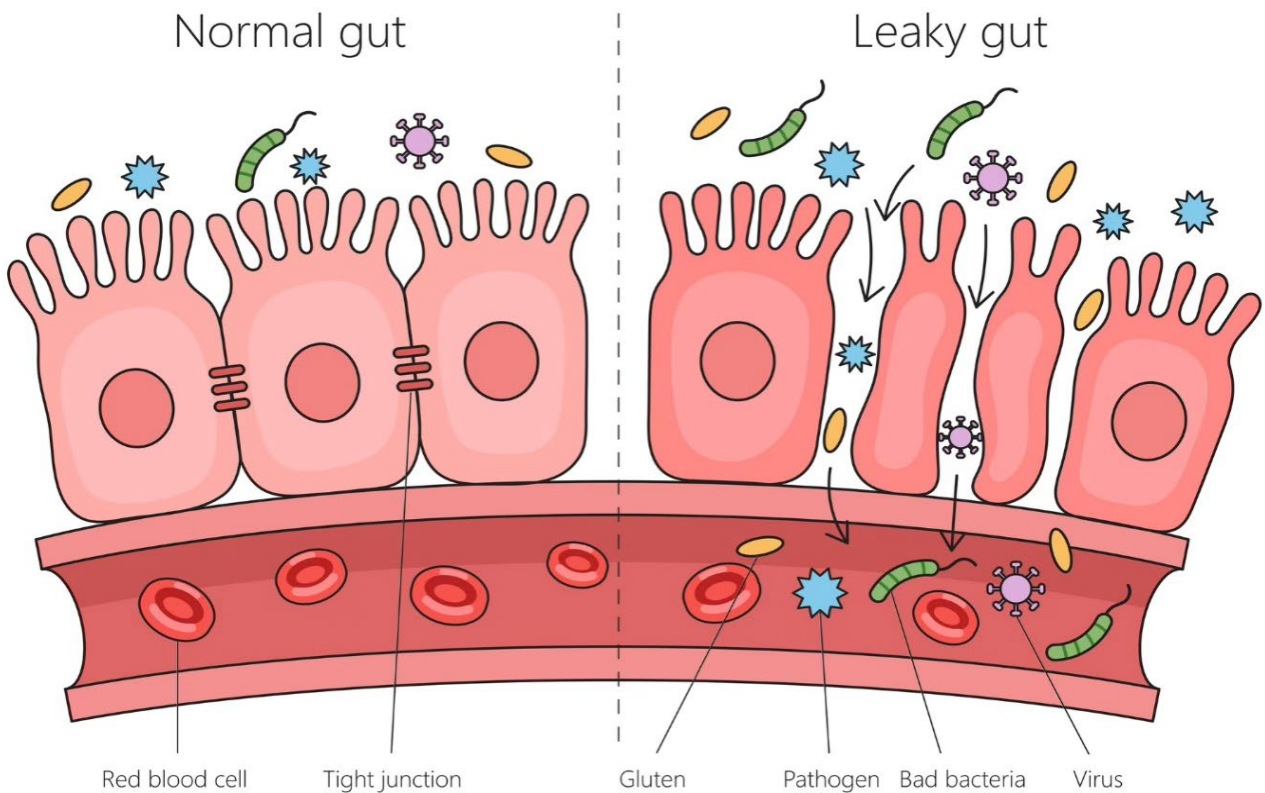
Research, including studies in *Frontiers in Psychiatry*, shows that a condition called leaky gut, or intestinal permeability, can trigger inflammation that impacts the brain. When the intestinal lining becomes too porous, undigested food particles, toxins, or pathogens escape into the bloodstream, prompting an immune response. These studies show this inflammation can cross the blood-brain barrier, disrupting neurotransmitter production and contributing to anxiety, depression, autism, negative thoughts and other psychiatric conditions.

[REF: Breaking down the barriers: the gut microbiome, intestinal permeability and stress-related psychiatric disorders](#)

My own experience bears this out. In my early 40s, I faced symptoms that doctors struggled to diagnose and find a common cause. These included chronic fatigue, migraines, neurological pain, severe anxiety and borderline clinical depression. The real issue was my gut, worn down by stress, antibiotics, medications, and poor diet. Healing it not only restored my physical health but lifted my mental fog and anxiety.

For those already in counseling, this means uncovering and addressing what’s disrupting your gut can enhance, and often accelerate the work being done in therapy.

### What Disrupts the Gut-Brain Connection?



As illustrated above, a healthy intestinal lining protects the blood stream from harmful bacteria, pathogens, and partially digested food particles. A “leaky” intestinal lining permits them into the bloodstream, causing nutrient malabsorption, autoimmunity, food intolerances, blood-brain breach, and systemic inflammation.

Several factors can throw your gut off balance, impacting your mental health. Here's what I see most often in my practice:

**Inflammatory Foods:** Gluten, dairy, refined sugars, and processed foods can irritate the gut lining, weakening its barriers and causing leaky gut. This inflammation can travel to the brain, worsening symptoms, and keep your nervous system in a constant state of high alert – also known as fight-or-flight.

**Microbial Imbalances:** Overgrowths of candida, bacteria, or parasites—often from antibiotics, long-term medication use, or an unhealthy diet—disrupt the microbiome. These produce waste products that can trigger mental health issues, like difficulty concentrating, persistent sadness, and increased threat response.

**Toxins:** Heavy metals, mold, or pesticides accumulate in the body's mucosal lining, tissues, bone matrix, even our cells, sparking immune responses that inflame the brain. These can build up over years from environmental exposure, non-organic foods (glyphosate), cookware, amalgam dental fillings, even tap water.

**Chronic Stress:** Stress, a common focus in therapy, releases cortisol, which damages the intestinal lining. This creates a cycle where inflammation fuels anxiety or depression, which in turn worsens gut health and perpetuates the stress cycle.

**Nutrient Deficiencies:** A struggling and toxic gut environment often fails to absorb nutrients like magnesium, zinc, or B vitamins, which are critical for neurotransmitter synthesis. Low levels can leave you feeling foggy or unmotivated, while denying your body the basic raw materials needed to repair and heal.

These create a feedback loop: a compromised gut amplifies mental health challenges, and emotional stress further harms the gut. Breaking this cycle is essential for lasting progress.

## How It All Fits Together

As you've been reading, there are three core areas where natural health therapies can directly support mental-health wellness: nutrition, stress, and gut health. They're deeply interconnected.

- Nutrition supplies the building blocks and cofactors the body needs to make neurotransmitters and convert hormones.
- Stress affects lifestyle, sleep, exercise, relationships, environment and nervous-system balance; chronic stress raises stress hormones and disrupts regulation.
- Bringing it all together, gut health controls how well you absorb those nutrients, how efficiently the body recycles and converts hormones, and how effectively neurotransmitters are regulated within the brain.

By addressing these areas, you can start to break cycles that may be feeding into mental health challenges, that counseling therapy alone cannot address.

## A Path to Clarity and Resilience

I've seen this approach transform lives, both in my own recovery and in my practice. One client, battling severe social anxiety despite therapy, discovered through lab testing that she had candida overgrowth along with gluten/dairy intolerances that triggered immune responses (via leaky gut) that fueled her symptoms. After removing those triggers, putting her on a gut healing protocol, and addressing specific nutrient deficiencies, her anxiety and mood lifted, and her therapy sessions became more productive.

At NuWell Health, we're here to help you thrive, and in large part, that starts with your gut. You're doing the hard work of therapy; now, consider how your digestive health can support that journey. By addressing inflammation, imbalances, and toxins, you can clear the mental fog and step into greater emotional resilience.

Start by taking our **Gut Health Assessment quiz** – provided below in the resource section of this eBook – and see what issues may be affecting your gut health. Then follow up with us for a personal online consultation at NuWell Health. Your gut holds answers, and it's ready to help you find the mental wellness you're seeking!

## Gut Health Self-Assessment Questionnaire

This short questionnaire helps you evaluate your gut health based on common symptoms and lifestyle factors. Answer each question by circling the number that best describes your experience over the past month. Add up your total score at the end to get a sense of your gut health status.

1. **Bloating or Abdominal Discomfort**

- 0 = Never
- 1 = Rarely (once a month)
- 2 = Sometimes (a few times a month)
- 3 = Frequently (weekly or more)

2. **Digestive Irregularity (e.g., constipation, diarrhea, or alternating)**

- 0 = Never
- 1 = Rarely (once a month)
- 2 = Sometimes (a few times a month)
- 3 = Frequently (weekly or more)

3. **Gas or Flatulence**

- 0 = Never
- 1 = Rarely (once a month)
- 2 = Sometimes (a few times a month)
- 3 = Frequently (weekly or more)

4. **Food Sensitivities or Reactions (e.g., bloating, fatigue after eating)**

- o 0 = Never
- o 1 = Rarely (to 1-2 foods)
- o 2 = Sometimes (to 3-5 foods)
- o 3 = Frequently (to 6+ foods or severe reactions)

5. **Fatigue or Low Energy**

- o 0 = Never
- o 1 = Rarely (occasional tiredness)
- o 2 = Sometimes (tired most days)
- o 3 = Frequently (exhausted daily)

6. **Mood Changes (e.g., anxiety, irritability, or brain fog)**

- o 0 = Never
- o 1 = Rarely (occasional mood shifts)
- o 2 = Sometimes (noticeable changes weekly)
- o 3 = Frequently (daily or severe)

7. **Skin Issues (e.g., acne, eczema, or rashes)**

- o 0 = Never
- o 1 = Rarely (mild or occasional)
- o 2 = Sometimes (moderate or recurring)
- o 3 = Frequently (severe or persistent)

## 8. History of Antibiotic Use

- o 0 = Never or rarely (less than 2 courses)
- o 1 = Occasionally (2-4 courses)
- o 2 = Moderately (5-7 courses)
- o 3 = Frequently (8+ courses or long-term use)

## 9. Stress Levels

- o 0 = Low (manageable, rare stress)
- o 1 = Moderate (occasional stress)
- o 2 = High (frequent stress)
- o 3 = Very High (constant or overwhelming stress)

## 10. Diet Quality (e.g., processed foods, sugar, or low fiber)

- o 0 = Excellent (mostly whole, unprocessed foods)
- o 1 = Good (some processed foods, adequate fiber)
- o 2 = Fair (frequent processed foods, low fiber)
- o 3 = Poor (mostly processed, little fiber)

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## Scoring Your Results

**Add up your scores from all 10 questions.**

**0 - 10:** Healthy Gut – Your gut seems well-balanced. Maintain your habits and consider periodic check-ins.

**11 - 20:** Mild Imbalance – Some signs of gut disruption. Small dietary or lifestyle tweaks could help.

**21 - 30:** Moderate Imbalance – Noticeable gut-related issues. Explore targeted changes or professional guidance with NuWell Health.

**31 - 40:** Significant Imbalance – Strong indicators of gut dysfunction. Consider deeper evaluation with a practitioner at NuWell Health.

This assessment reflects your current state based on symptoms and habits. For a more precise picture, functional lab tests like IgG food sensitivity or organic acid panels can pinpoint specific triggers—something I often use with clients. Either way, this is a solid starting point to guide your next steps toward better gut and mental health.

# Closing: Bringing it all Together

**Stephen A. Luther MEd MEd LPC**

As I sit here to write our eBook's closing reflection, my mind drifts back to 2009 - when I established my counseling practice here in Western Pennsylvania for the very first time. After completing my graduate training and getting my mental health license, I thought I had all of the tools I needed to assist people in untangling the knots in their minds. Therapy sessions were filled with talk therapy, cognitive reframing, and emotional processing, and I witnessed breakthroughs with some of my clients.

However, as my practice grew to over 60 counselors serving multiple states, an alarming trend became clear: no matter how deeply we dug into someone's psyche, many remained stuck, progress would stall out, and symptoms would return. Nothing is harder for a counselor than not being able to help a client or only being able to take them so far.

Once I began looking inward at my own life, things started falling into place more clearly. For years, I was operating on fumes: high-stress days at work led directly into tense evenings at home for which there was little relief. It was an exhausting cycle that kept repeating itself over and over again. Adrenal fatigue was first to hit, with that deep tiredness that even coffee couldn't relieve. Soon thereafter, brain fog set in, making it impossible to string thoughts together during sessions. Insulin resistance soon ensued, turning every carb into an instant crash and inflammation ravaging through my joints like an unwelcome guest. And then there were the gut issues, with constant bloating, irregularity, indigestion, discomfort, as well as chronic pain making itself felt with every step.

But the real impact was how easily my mind became overwhelmed with anxiety, depression, and irritability. As a counselor, I had extensive knowledge of mental health strategies such as reframing my thoughts and meditation, but nothing worked to alleviate my stress or ease the physical manifestations that mocked my efforts to manage them. Feeling helpless at best, I was accepting that being a shell of myself was all that could ever be expected in my life, and it was becoming my reality.

At my lowest point, resignation became my realization: mental illness does not exist separate from physical well-being; the two are intimately connected. What had eluded me and so many of my clients was an understanding that physical imbalances weaken emotional resilience just as mental strain consumes our physical bodies. Science has long acknowledged this reality, but for whatever reason, we are not taught this in school or equipped to help our clients navigate this connection. As I navigated challenges with my clients and began to explore the mind-body connection, both in their treatment and in my own journey, I realized it was time to create something different. That is when NuWell Health emerged with an approach focused on root cause analysis, rather than simply masking symptoms. NuWell Health was designed to utilize functional nutrition, naturopathy, and holistic approaches to address the whole person.

My journey taught me that true freedom lies in unifying the mind and the body with an integrated approach to healing. From resignation, I moved towards vitality; not perfect, but profoundly better. With my hope restored and my focus on helping others, NuWell Health became a reality. It was rewarding and exciting for me to see this ebook come together, but the real reward comes from seeing clients healed and restored to fulfill their purpose in life. You've heard my story and that of others on the team; now it's time to take control of your story and decide how it unfolds, rather than letting your symptoms dictate it for you.

If you lack hope, you can borrow some of ours until you get your own!

**Connect with an intake counselor for a free consultation today to start your journey to health and freedom!**

<https://nuwellhealth.org/>



## About the Authors

### Stephen A. Luther, MEd, MEd, LPC

Stephen A. Luther, MEd, MEd, LPC, is a Licensed Professional Counselor with over 20 years of experience guiding individuals toward mental and emotional wellness. As the founder of Grace Christian Counseling, WPA Counseling, NuWell Online Counseling and NuWell Health, Stephen has built a legacy of compassionate, integrative care, leading a team of over 60 counselors across multiple states. His journey began in Western Pennsylvania in 2009, where he established a practice rooted in combining Biblical principles with evidence-based therapeutic techniques to address mental health challenges.

Stephen's personal health journey profoundly shaped his holistic approach to counseling. After experiencing chronic stress and physical health issues such as adrenal fatigue, insulin resistance, and inflammation, he recognized the inseparable link between physical and mental well-being. These challenges, which led to anxiety and depression, inspired him to address the root causes of health struggles rather than merely treating symptoms. At NuWell Health, Stephen and his team integrate nutrition, stress management, and gut health insights to create comprehensive healing plans that empower clients to break free from cycles of physical and emotional distress.

With dual master's degrees in education and counseling, Stephen brings a wealth of expertise to his work, blending clinical care with a faith-based perspective. His commitment to uncovering the mind-body connection drives his mission to provide personalized, transformative care.



## Jaclyn Rathbun, CFNC

Hi! I am Jaclyn Rathbun, Certified Functional Nutrition Coach.

With a Bachelor of Science degree and certification as a Functional Nutrition Counselor from the Functional Nutrition Alliance, I bring a specialized focus on supporting clients in chronic disease management, gut health, and hormonal balance. My approach to health and wellness is rooted in understanding that while our bodies are designed to function optimally, various factors can disrupt this balance, leading to health challenges. I believe that by identifying each individual's unique needs and addressing foundational imbalances through nutrition and lifestyle modification, we can create a personalized path to wellness.

In my sessions, clients can expect a collaborative, individualized approach focused on uncovering root causes rather than merely addressing symptoms. I use tracking tools to assess each client's progress and adapt interventions to ensure we're moving toward their goals. My role is to work in partnership with clients, crafting a customized plan that empowers them to achieve optimal wellness.

My own journey into natural health began with my own experience managing Hashimoto's Thyroiditis, or autoimmune hypothyroid disease. Traditional medical approaches didn't provide the relief I needed, so I set out on a journey to understand and heal my body holistically. Through this I learned that true wellness comes from caring for the whole self—body, mind, and spirit. Now, I am dedicated to helping others find their own paths to vibrant health.

Outside of work, I enjoy spending time with my family and dog, staying active, reading fantasy and historical fiction as well as continuing education materials in nutrition and wellness, and unwinding with a good movie or show. These interests keep me grounded and continually inspire my commitment to holistic health for myself and my family.



## Dr. Jennifer Hampton, ND

Hello, I am Dr. Jennifer, a naturopathic doctor on a mission to help this world find healing one person at a time. My personal pursuit of wholeness, interwoven with my ongoing study of nature, science, and tradition, guides my approach to health.

I completed my undergraduate degree in biochemistry from Messiah University in Harrisburg, Pennsylvania, where I gained a deep appreciation for basic science and the vital role of philosophy, culture, and faith in our healing journeys. I then trained in the naturopathic medical program at the National University of Natural Medicine (NUNM) in Portland, Oregon. At NUNM, I earned my doctorate and provided care in the teaching clinics under the supervision of naturopathic physicians. My journey spans lab science, medical texts, and clinical care, yet it also ventures into the heart of nature, shaping a distinct perspective on health and vitality.

Soon after completing my training, I returned to Pennsylvania to increase access to naturopathic medicine in a state still unfamiliar yet deeply in need of this approach to health care. My practice has developed to include an emphasis on mental and spiritual health as I find that no health story is complete without these components. I also love educating my patients on how their gut, brain, and hormones all interconnect and exploring the expansive toolbox of natural medicine to find just the right tool for their needs.

Important to know about me-- my primary title is not "Doctor" but "Mama!" I have two sweet boys aged 3 and 1 and raising them with my husband has been my life's greatest adventure, challenge, and joy. Every day with them is an opportunity to see the body's amazing capacity for growth, change, and vitality in action.

The pursuit of wholeness is a lifelong journey. As we work together, my heart is to be a mentor on your journey as well as authentic fellow sojourner. I do my best to practice the lifestyle I teach, but let's face it, it's hard work! There are plenty of three steps forward two steps back moments. Working with me is NOT about perfection but process. Working with me is NOT about fad diets, popular products, long-lists of rules, or optimal "compliance." It is about a grace-filled, safe space to explore sustainable healthy habits that will take a life-time to cultivate. So, let's do this! Together. One step at a time.



## Tracy Manno, IHP, CFNC, BARA, OPC

I'm Tracy Manno, an integrative health practitioner, functional nutritionist, and ordained pastoral counselor dedicated to guiding individuals toward vibrant health through a holistic, root-cause approach. My journey into wellness began as a young father, navigating significant health challenges with my three children, which sparked a deep passion for natural healing that now defines my work.

With certifications in integrative health, functional nutrition, bioacoustic research, and pastoral counseling, I blend evidence-based science with compassionate, faith-grounded guidance to support lasting transformation.

My path to wellness was shaped by diverse experiences, including years as a business executive, international missions, and leading several non-profit organizations. These roles sharpened my ability to connect with people and tackle complex challenges with clarity and purpose. As a worship leader, songwriter, and published author of Biblical life coaching books, I weave creativity and faith into my life's work, bringing a unique perspective to health and healing. Outside my practice, I cherish time with my family, writing music, and exploring God's nature, living out the principles I share with my clients.

My work focuses on uncovering the root causes of chronic physical and mental health challenges, using tools like at-home functional lab testing (organic acids, toxic metals, nutrient profiles) and detailed symptoms and health history analysis. My protocols combine evidence-based therapies, including dietary interventions, targeted supplementation, and lifestyle adjustments, to support physical healing, mental clarity, and emotional resilience. Informed by my deep-rooted faith, my approach merges the clinical precision of functional medicine with the compassionate guidance of pastoral counseling, creating personalized plans that resonate with each client's unique needs.

I consider it a great privilege to walk alongside you on your wellness journey, working together to uncover the root of your challenges and build a foundation for lasting health.