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Free your mind and your belly will follow

Posted on 12 November 2010 by Ronnie Reese



Photo credit: Mike Baird

If the brain is the control center of the human body, the digestive system is the engine room.

When digestion malfunctions, our systems shut down. We often overlook the effect our brains have on what we are literally able to "stomach." Heightened nerves elicit "butterflies" and a loss of appetite. Stress manifests itself in pain and ulcers.

"The colon, like the face, responds to every passing emotion," Dr. John Harvey Kellogg wrote in his essay, "Psychology of the Colon." Kellogg is best known as one of the creators of corn flakes cereal, but prior to his foray into breakfast food, he was a renowned nutritionist and proponent of intestinal health. He believed that even the slightest emotional tumult such as "light anxiety, annoyance, apprehension, or ill temper" can bring all normal movement of our stomachs and intestines to a

halt.

Avoiding such illness and achieving and maintaining proper stomach health was the subject of "Gut Wisdom: A Love Your Belly Workshop" held this week at Cousin's Incredible Vitality Raw Food Restaurant in Irving Park. Led by digestive consultant and colon therapist Alyce Sorokie, "Gut Wisdom" provided lessons on how emotions impact digestion, how we can "armor" our stomachs against internal and external stressors and how to listen and respond to belly symptoms.

"I'm all for TLC for the belly," said Sorokie, author of the book "Gut Wisdom: Understanding and Improving Your Digestive Health" and daughter of Michael Sorokie, founder of one of Chicago's first health food stores. When her father died of colon cancer at age 60, Sorokie took over the store and eventually founded the Partners In Wellness colon therapy center in August 1990.

"It's our radar," Sorokie said of the stomach, equating symptoms of belly sickness to owning a Toyota when she was in her 20s: She never changed the oil and ignored the flashing service indicator light. "I'll do this next week," she said, delaying finding a remedy for her car's ailing health until smoke began to billow out of it and her Toyota finally broke down.

"Most of us are so busy until a pain or a nudge gets in our way," Sorokie said. "And if we can explore and make changes, it's like we're paying attention to my Toyota's flashing lights.

"Listen to those warning signs," she added. "They're there as blessings. They're gifts."

Sorokie recommended self-administered gut tension relief such as therapeutic belly massages meant to trigger stress and release points in lieu of medication, which pleased workshop attendee and surgical technician Laura Garza. Garza occasionally assists a local gastroenterologist with colonoscopies and sees a big difference in the hospital approach and Sorokie's hands-on holistic methods and therapy.

"Every time someone has some kind of issue, they run to the doctors and all they give them are prescription drugs," Garza said. "It's drugs and surgery. There's no real healing going on.

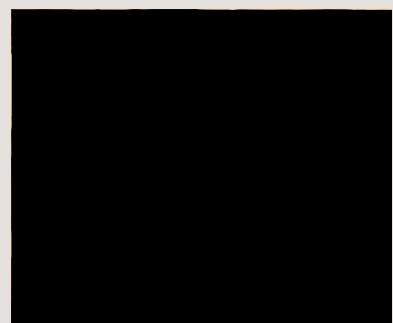
"They're not really getting down to the root of the problem."

For Sorokie, "trust your gut" and "gut instinct" aren't just catchphrases. They're

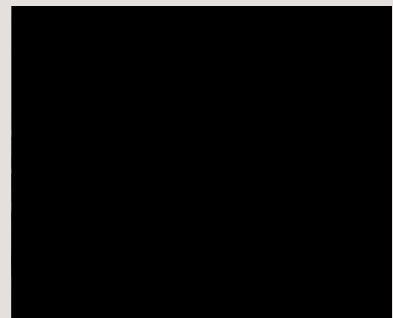
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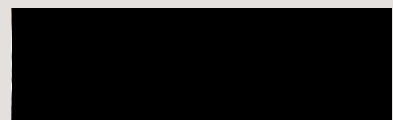
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reminders of the connection between the mental and the physical in our bodies – a connection that forms long before we are born.

“When we were just eggs developing, part of the tissue there is called the neural crest,” Sorokie explained. “From the neural crest, one part of that grew to be our spinal column and our brain, and the other part of that same piece of tissue grew to be our gut – something called the enteric nervous system – which lines the esophagus, the stomach, the small intestine and the large intestine.

“They are intimately connected.”

Indeed, the control center and the engine room are forever linked. Sorokie has spent much of her life reconciling the relationship between the two and is just as passionate about her career as she was toward the intimate group gathered to witness her gut wisdom.

“I thank you from the bottom of my heart,” Sorokie said in closing. “And my belly.”

Tags | Alyce Sorokie, Chicago, colon, digestion, Gut Wisdom, health, stomach

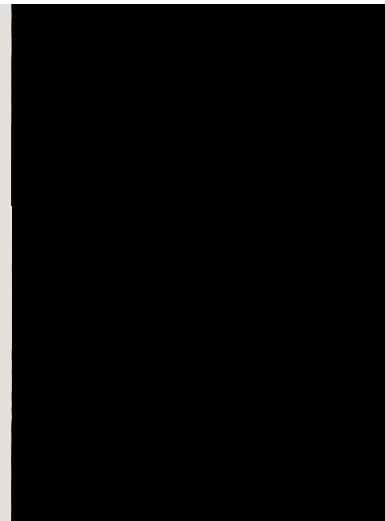
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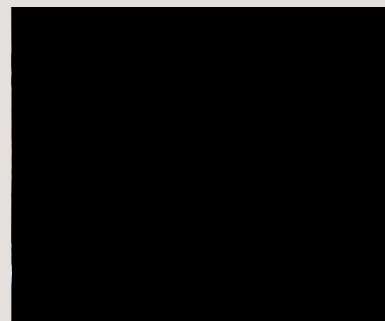
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