

# Gastrointestinal (GI) & Digestive Health

Supporting Individuals with Anxiety, Anger, or Aggression

## Why It Matters

- Up to 90% of people with autism or developmental disabilities experience GI problems—often undiagnosed or poorly managed.
- Chronic GI and digestive issues affect:
  - Physical health, cognition, emotional well-being
  - Anxiety, agitation, aggression
  - Pain management can lead to community participation, which can lead to an increased quality of life
- 💡 Many symptoms can be effectively treated when root causes are identified and addressed.

## Root Causes of Anxiety & Challenging Behaviour

- Biological: Food intolerances, infections (yeast, clostridia, bacteria), toxins, leaky gut, nutrient deficiencies, constipation, etc.
- Lifestyle/Diet: Refined foods, sugar, poor chewing, low fibre, lack of whole/fermented foods, etc.
- Environmental/Stress: Chronic anxiety, high cortisol, toxin exposure, poor detoxification, etc.
- Co-Occurring Conditions: Dental/oral issues, immune dysfunction, inflammation, etc.

## Core Tools for Supporters

### **1 Biomedical Testing**

Identify toxins, nutrient imbalances, food intolerances, infections through the use of a Naturopath, Registered Dietician or Functional Medical Practitioner.

### **2 Targeted Treatment**

Address yeast, bacteria overgrowth, constipation, mitochondrial imbalance, leaky gut, etc. as informed by the biomedical testing.

### **3 Nutrition Planning**

Introduce a balanced whole-food diet, proper hydration, possible chewing supports, possible bowel health management, as directed by testing and treatment plans.

### **3 Food Elimination**

Based on the results of the biomedical testing and treatment plans, adjust intake of foods including possibly removing excess sugar, dairy, gluten, and processed foods.

### **Supportive Strategies:**

- Be a strong advocate and engage with experts to explore deeper testing to direct a treatment plan.
- Offer options to ensure the person can best make an informed decision about their nutrition.
- Oral/dental health checks are necessary to rule out and treat possible pain-related behaviours.

## Best Practices

- Collaborate with primary care, GI specialists, naturopaths, and nutritionists, etc. and establish a comprehensive care circle to help treat unmet needs of the person, rather than managing their symptoms of discomfort.
- Monitor stool quality daily (e.g., Bristol Stool Chart), also ensure dental health is monitored regularly.

## Key Takeaway

A healthy gut is the foundation of well-being. By addressing unmet needs, not just manage symptoms, supporters can help the person experience less anxiety & aggression, improved cognition, and enhanced quality of life.