

# COVID-19 and Your Stomach

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“If your stomach disputes you, lie down and pacify it with cool thoughts.”  
— Satchel Paige

To develop a relationship with your stomach, get beyond the notion that your stomach is there to serve your needs. It’s the other way 'round. There are quite a few situations where your stomach is in disagreement with what you want to ingest. Stomach comfort is about what makes your stomach comfortable, which may be uncomfortable from your point of view.

I have a sensitive stomach, but I can’t tell whether this means my stomach is reactive or aggressive. My experience has led me to feel that my stomach has a mind of its own and is somewhat fed up with my eating habits. As a result, I know contemplatively consult my stomach before I eat anything.

I recently ate at a nouveau-Mexican restaurant that mixed corn, cheese, hot sauce, whipped cream, bananas, and caramel. My taste buds—which have a short memory—were able to navigate the hairpin curve from pepper-hot to dairy-sweet but the whole mess didn’t go down well. Most of it never made it out of the restaurant.

When you're healthy and hungry, your stomach knows its business and will do yeoman's work to start digestion. But when your health is weak or your stomach disoriented, you need a more mature, mind-stomach relationship. I've never heard anyone else talk about one's mind-stomach relationships, but mine started as a result of my ayahuasca experiences.



## Into the jungle, and beyond

Ayahuasca is a medicine, ceremony, and other-worldly adventure. Many cultures have herbal knowledge that includes medicinal and therapeutic plant use, of these, ayahuasca is an unusual example. Widely by Amazonian cultures, ayahuasca is a water-based extraction of a combination of tropical plants whose chemical effect only manifests in combination. The plant constituents are not edible, and the result is so far from palatable that it goes right off the scale.

If you're interested, I have discovered how to simulate the famous taste of ayahuasca. Steam a full pound of spinach to get two cups of strangely unappealing, green water. Boil this down to  $\frac{1}{4}$  cup of thick, repugnant liquid. Mix in a tablespoon of lemon juice, and drink it. I don't think it will hurt you, but I'm sure it will start an unusual experience. An experience which, along with the ideas I'm presenting here, could forever change your relationship with your stomach.

Ayahuasca's traditional mixture combines three ingredients: a dry pound of two tropical plants and the juice of a lemon. If you're short on lemons you can use muriatic acid. One of the two traditional plants is Psychotria, a shrub in the coffee family. You use the leaves, not the berries. Psychotria is also called "false ipecac." Ipecac is an emetic used to induce vomiting.

The second ingredient, Banisteriopsis, is known as "the vine of the dead." It's a fast-growing, friendly vine whose thick woody stem is beaten to shreds before being added to the pot. The plants and

acid are simmered together for many hours. The acid is neutralized, though the taste remains. The mass is then strained off and the remaining liquid is boiled down to a black, viscous slurry.

The result is a chemical curiosity of which your stomach will have its own opinion. The experience is entirely different from anything taught in a textbook. Most discussions of ayahuasca center on your head and what happens in your mind, but my focus is on your stomach, and what this experience taught me about mine.

The gastric experience is a cleansing pressure wash, more thorough than any fast or enema. The shamans say the ayahuasca draws toxins from your body which are expelled from your lungs, sinuses, and G.I. tract. The stomach plays a role, but only one of several.

Among ayahuasca's many mental effects is mild anesthesia, somewhat like nitrous oxide, so one's observations are distorted. In addition to dulling one's sensations, one becomes highly sensitive to sound, light, and motion. The mind-body connection is stretched to the point where it's difficult to walk, having waves of nausea similar to being seasick. These are just the gross effects.

It is my habit to prepare for ayahuasca with a day of light eating followed by a two-day juice fast, plenty of liquids and gentle laxatives, similar to how one prepares for a colonoscopy. As a result, when I take ayahuasca it pours down a clear drain. One would expect it to pass right through and, to a large extent, it does.

In the course of many ayahuasca experiences, I noticed something strange. I usually experience secondary nausea ten hours after first drinking the mixture. This is easily four to six hours after several waves of expelling from either end that has been followed by hours of sleep and rest. This morning nausea is relieved by vomiting a small amount of liquid. After this, my whole system becomes calm.

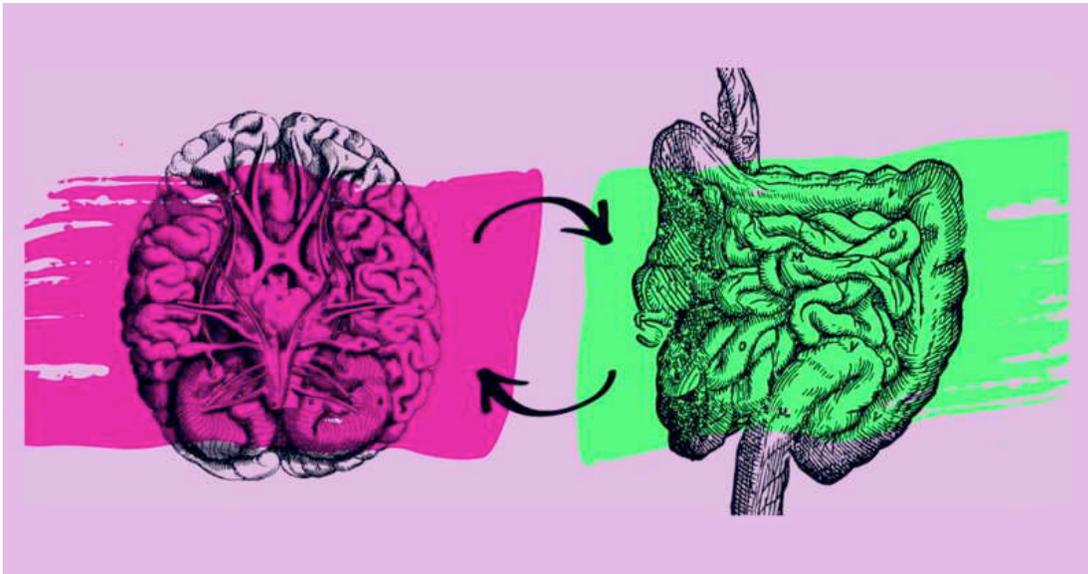
The mystery is that the morning vomit appears to be pure ayahuasca. Judging by the smell and color, what I expelled appears to be one of the two distinct plant components that were prepared before they were ingested as a mixture. Hours after first receiving and hypothetically passing this medicinal combination, my stomach not only retained but also separated some of the ayahuasca, preventing some of it from passing through my system.

Everything I've been told about the stomach explains that it serves as an agitator to mix ingested material with gastric fluids which it releases in pulses through the pyloric sphincter into the upper small intestines. This is an incomplete description. My stomach is also sensing, titrating, and unmixing the mixture. It is doing something more sophisticated than simple homogenization.

Incomplete emptying of the stomach is referred to as gastroparesis, and it's recognized as a disability. While there is a lot of "frothy" talk about enteric intelligence, I don't find any research recognizing what this intelligence does. It's noted that most of your serotonin and a substantial portion of the body's dopamine is produced in the intestines. 90% of the signals along the vagus nerve are communications from the G.I. tract to the brain. I read comments about mood alteration and emotional intuition that remind me of social talk about racism where everyone has something to say but no one recognizes it.

What if the stomach intelligence decides what, when, and how much material to release into the small intestines? What if this does not constitute a dysfunction, but a considering and proactive stomach? That would mean that many of the mechanical interventions—pharmaceutical, laparoscopic, and surgical—are misguided. It would not be the first time.

What is clearly repeated in the academic literature is that we know little about the function of the G.I. tract or the role of the enteric nervous system. Recall that the G.I. tract shepherds half of the cells in the body that are nonhuman. They are not created in our bodies and do not share human history or DNA. These cells reproduce and operate independently from us.



## Communion and communication

The independent intelligence of my stomach was further clarified to me through a conversation I had with an impatient old crone who claimed to be my stomach. This voice spoke at a point in one of my hallucinogenic ayahuasca experiences. It was an entirely rational voice that had a brief and succinct message which I have since taken to heart.

I consider hallucinations to be much like trance visions: the experiences are real but their interpretations must be indirect. Like all ideas, hallucinations come from somewhere and represent something. These experiences convey complex structures and meanings that can be vague, concise, emotional, or conceptual. They have all the makings of inspiration in an uncertain context.

Sometimes—though rarely—these hallucinations are verbal, musical, or mathematical. In this case, my hallucination was verbal but, aside from its dissociated origin as the voice of my stomach, it sounded exactly like any other voice of my own.

My stomach told me this: “You don’t pay enough attention to what I’m doing, and you eat things thoughtlessly. I get impatient with your insensitivity and I’m not going to make up for your unawareness.” I attempted to ask what I should do and whether I could get more direction. The

communication channel was already dissolving but I got the impression that further directions would be available if I looked for them.

That was the last clearly spoken message I heard from her, but it gave me the lasting impression that I should attend, inquire, imagine, and intuit the needs of my stomach and the consequences of my actions. In addition, this brief conversation left me with a certain trust that some force more capable and aware than me was dealing with my gastrointestinal affairs. This has enabled me to approach my own episodes of illness, dysfunction, or discomfort with greater calm and detachment. I now see my mind and senses as playing a more supporting role and I allow my verbally silent body to coordinate most operations.

Most of our G.I. functions are taboo. None of its operations are considered socially acceptable, and this disrespect directly influences our relationship with ourselves. We could psychoanalyze each of our G.I. functions, in the manner of Sigmund Freud, and benefit from it. I suspect that each of us has personal issues, and these issues offer a direct route to a better understanding of our body. I'll focus on two issues that pertain to my stomach: vomiting and ingestion.



## To vomit or not to vomit

Ayahuasca has trained me to be a skilled vomiter. Before ayahuasca, my approach to vomiting was probably the same as yours: painful, repugnant, and depressing. I now recognize these feelings as irresponsible, immature, and unhelpful.

If vomiting is something your stomach needs, then your responsibility is that of an emergency responder. Imagine an emergency responder whose attitude about attending someone in distress is to consider the experience painful, repugnant, and depressing. The only appropriate response one can have to an emergency responder that carries that attitude is to punch them.

I have now learned to relax and facilitate vomiting. I have learned to work with my stomach, to calm, endorse, and reassure it. To tell my stomach that I understand its need. I organize my esophagus, breath, tongue, diaphragm, and abdominal muscles to make vomiting painless and efficient.

I have found that, much like any other pain, the painful sensations are due to stress, tension, and expectation. I can remove these forces in those muscles and tissues outside the stomach and, when I do, the discomfort of vomiting is greatly reduced.

No longer do I heave, cramp, curse, and sputter like some evil emergency room nurse. Vomiting is now a brief episode of connection, coordination, and relief. My stomach relaxes quickly and I support it entirely. The experience of vomiting is now one of relief.

My stomach does not speak to me in words, but I speak to it, or to her. if I want to anthropomorphize the connection, but that's not really necessary. Be aware that rarely do we communicate with another entity that does not have a gender. You may think gender is superfluous but every character in mythology or imagination has a presumed gender. Your stomach has intelligence, lives in a world you'll never understand, and has no gender. Or does it? I'll leave that for you to determine.



## Everything we eat

You make two decisions before you eat something: is it familiar and does it taste good. Familiarity is determined from memory and taste from taste buds. Both of these are imperfect and neither should

be relied upon without consulting your intuition. Many of our eating indiscretions stem from failing to make the wiser choice. But what is intuition?

Intuition is what arises from your subconscious associations and unconscious reflexes. It's information that comes from outside your awareness. The huge range of possibilities is a problem. If you can't judge intuition, then you can't distinguish between good, bad, and indifferent ideas.

Judging intuition is a process that requires sensitivity and attention, similar to channeling spirit, or channeling whatever. It begins with guesswork, memory, and imagination. These create an expectation of where to look and what to see and, once you focus your attention in this manner, something will appear. It's a process of trial and error. The ideas you engage will have some effect in guiding your actions, and by judging their effect you come to learn to improve your intuition.

Eating should not be impulsive, as my Mexican restaurant experience illustrated. The least you can do is to stop and think about it, and when you do, you should listen. But listen to more than your memory and your taste buds. Listen to your stomach. Your stomach knows.

Your stomach speaks in inclinations, moods, and reflections, second thoughts and fleeting images. Learn to amplify and retain these, to take them seriously and give them a vote that's equal to your chattering mind and impulsive tastes.

Sugar is a great example. Our taste buds have been programmed to like it and our memories of sweet things are good. But if you consult your stomach it will not endorse it. Your stomach knows sweet things are a deception like bright flowers to a bee. Sugar wants you to eat it because the candida in your gut thrives on it and has hijacked your brain.

If you consult your intestines, you'll find little support for sugar. Overcoming the sugar addiction requires a deeper connection with your intestines and, by developing this connection, you can develop the kind of right intuition that will better serve digestion generally.



## COVID-19 and the Stomach

There is little information about COVID-19's effect on the G.I. tract aside from its similarity to the stomach flu. Since medicine does not respect the mind-body connection, this is not helpful. I add to this my own experience with a stomach-flu-like experience that I assume was COVID-19, and my own mind-body intuition in support of G.I. health.

I cannot be sure I had COVID-19 but an increasing number of healthcare practitioners, with whom I'm in contact, support the belief that many unusual illnesses over the past two months have been unrecognized cases of COVID-19. It's now recognized that the levels of infection have been ten times what's been publicly reported and that COVID-19 started to present at least a month before the disease was recognized. This information, in addition to the nature of my illness, leads me to believe I've been "under the weather" with COVID-19 for over a month.

Two features of my G.I. experience were unusual. First, it was brief and strong. It only took four to six hours to fully manifest and caused general distress throughout my system. It manifested with diarrhea, vomiting, and a little fever the first night. This remitted the next day during which I mostly slept, and then reappeared as serious stomach pain—like an ulcer—the second night. After 36 hours the distress diminished; I was clearly recovering after 48 hours.

The second striking effect may sound disgusting, but it was interesting at the time. The color and texture of what came out of my stomach appeared identical to what was being ejected from my colon. If you think about that, it seems impossible. In my experience, the two substances—what comes out of

the stomach and what comes from the large intestine—have little similarity. Usually, one either has trouble in the upper or the lower G.I. tract, and they're distinct. In this case, the separation was indistinct and the experience was happening equally throughout my system. I found this reassuring as it suggested a unified response; my system was unified in rejecting the infection.

I continued to feel weak after 48-hours as if I was not absorbing nutrients, so I purchased a middle-grade probiotic (25 billion cultures which I took twice a day) which seemed to improve my digestion and energy levels immediately.

It is now two weeks since the G.I. infection first appeared. I read that many of the COVID-19 intestinal infections have metamorphosed into pulmonary infections two weeks later, so I have remained concerned. However, I only seem to be improving, though there have been a couple of days when I felt poorly.

I've also read that Vitamin-D is suspected to have prophylactic effects, so I have been taking multi-vitamins and taking daily walks in the sunshine. I've continued my probiotics, a bland diet, plenty of liquids, and rest. I still feel some systemic infection hanging on in a flu-like manner. As I continue to improve two weeks after the G.I. infection, I become increasingly confident that the infection has run its course.

## Stomach Teaching

I've created an audio file called “**The Gut Part I - Stomach**” that focuses on interoception. It is not curative and it is not designed for a person in the throes of a G.I. infection, though it might help them. The audio designed to create balance and the alliance I value and maintain between my mind and stomach.

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