

# Psychological Therapies *in* Paediatric GI Management



## An Evidence-Based Approach for Children with Gastrointestinal Disorders

### Why Refer to The Gut Centre?

Psychological therapies; cognitive behavioural therapy and gut-directed hypnotherapy are clinically proven to reduce:

- GI symptoms (pain, bloating, nausea, constipation/diarrhoea)
- School absenteeism
- Anxiety and emotional distress that worsen gastrointestinal symptoms

### Brain-Gut Axis in Children

The gut and brain are connected via the vagus nerve. Stress and anxiety can heighten gut sensitivity, while ongoing symptoms fuel emotional distress – a cycle common in conditions like IBS, abdominal pain, and rumination syndrome.

### Who It Helps

For children 4+ and adolescents with:

- Disorders of the gut-brain interaction
- (e.g. irritable bowel syndrome, constipation, diarrhea, functional dyspepsia)
- Reflux, globus, vomiting disorders, rumination disorder
- Childhood faecal incontinence
- Inflammatory Bowel Disease (Crohns and Ulcerative Colitis) and Coeliac Disease
- Avoidant/restrictive food intake disorder (ARFID) and gut-related feeding concerns
- Neurodivergence (e.g. ADHD, Autism Spectrum Disorder) with co-occurring gut symptoms

**Medicare and Rebates:** Patients may be eligible for a Medicare rebate with a Mental Health Care Plan (MHCP) from their GP. Private health and NDIS may apply.

Level one evidence-based treatments:

### Cognitive Behavioural Therapy (CBT)

CBT helps children learn to identify and manage their thoughts, feelings, and behaviours.

### Gut-Directed Hypnotherapy (GDH)

Delivered by highly trained psychologists:

Clinical trials showing GDH:

- Is safe and well-tolerated (ages 4+)
- Uses child-friendly imagery and relaxation
- Typically 8-10 tailored sessions required

### Additional Therapies

Other age-appropriate tools like play therapy may also be utilised to support patient outcomes, addressing gut issues using non-invasive treatments, without restrictive diets or medications.

### Outcomes & Evidence

Gut-directed therapies show:

- 80% success in paediatric IBS
- Reduced symptom severity and emotional distress
- Lasting improvements up to 4.5 years
- References: Whorwell 2006; Vlieger 2007; Chumpitazi 2021

### How To Refer:

- <https://www.thegutcentre.com/specialists/> make a referral for your patient.
- Fax: VIC Head Office: (03) 9853 0033
- Medical Objects: Search for "The Gut Centre" or "Jim Kantidakis"

