

Spring Clean Your Microbiota: Trillions of Tiny Lives That Influence Your Health

Have you ever wondered why some people seem naturally healthier or happier than others? Certainly genes, diet, lifestyle, and environment play important roles. But the secret to wellness might lie in our microbiota — the trillions of microscopic organisms living in and on each person. Scientists believe these trillions of tiny lives influence our health in significant ways.

Microbiota versus Microbiome?

Your body is home to more than 100 trillion microscopic organisms. Most are bacteria, but other microbes like yeasts, viruses, protozoa, and fungi are in the mix.^{1,2} The collection of microbes is known as your microbiota and the collection of their genes is known as your microbiome.

The microbiota of the gut (large intestine) gets significant attention because it's where most of your microbes live. But all parts of your body are teeming with trillions of tiny lives, living and working together as part of an ecosystem. If you examined your body under a microscope, you'd see trillions of microbes in your digestive tract, on your skin, in your mouth, nose, and respiratory tract, in your urogenital tract, and other places throughout your body.

How the Microbiota Influences Health

Most bacteria in your microbiota are beneficial. They work hard 24/7, doing various jobs to keep you healthy, including:

- Producing essential vitamins like vitamin K and several B vitamins.³
- Helping break down fiber from plant foods and digest nutrients. And they produce compounds that nourish and strengthen the lining of your digestive tract.^{2,3,4}
- Helping keep harmful bacteria and other pathogens from multiplying and making you sick.^{1,2}
- Helping maintain a balanced pH level and prevent infections in a women's urogenital tract by producing lactic acid and other acidifying compounds.²
- Helping fight off harmful bacteria in your mouth that cause cavities, bad breath, and gum disease.²
- Helping prevent the overgrowth of bacteria and yeasts on your skin, which is linked with skin infections and eczema.²
- Positively influencing your mental health, cognitive function, and mood through the gut-brain axis connection.^{1,4}
- And influence metabolic health including weight regulation, blood sugar levels, and cardiovascular health.^{1,4}

Although different types of bacteria live in various parts of your body, a healthy microbiota has a diverse and balanced blend of bacteria and microbes. Some research suggests that less microbial diversity or a lower amount of healthful microbes (known as dysbiosis) may be at the root of many health problems.^{1,2,3,4} For example, scientists note that people with inflammatory bowel disease, certain autoimmune diseases, irritable bowel syndrome, diabetes, and obesity often have a less diverse gut microbiota.^{1,4}

How to Care for Your Microbiota

Everyone's microbiota is unique, and what's more, it changes over time. Your diet, lifestyle, medications, and even how well you sleep all influence the mix of bacteria and microbes in your body.³ That means there are plenty of opportunities to care for and improve the health and balance of your microbiota. The following tips can help support a more diverse microbiota.

Eat a rainbow of plant foods

Your bacteria need to eat, and their preferred food is fiber from plant foods like fruits, vegetables, legumes, nuts, seeds, and whole grains.³ Each of these foods provides different types of fiber and a unique blend of nutrients, so try to incorporate a wide range of plant foods into your diet daily. An easy way to do this is by eating the rainbow — aim to eat a wide variety of colorful whole foods with your meals and snacks daily.

Moderate sugar and highly processed foods

Eating large amounts of sugar or unhealthy fats and food additives from highly processed packaged and fast foods promotes inflammation throughout your body. Diets high in these foods are linked with less microbial diversity.^{3,4} Whenever possible, cook at home using whole foods and healthy fats like olive oil as ingredients. Substitute plain or fruit-flavored seltzer water or herbal tea for sugar-sweetened beverages. If you have a sweet tooth, reach for fruit first, and save baked goods or pastries for an occasional treat.

Prioritize sleep

Sleep disturbances, inadequate sleep, or disruptions to your sleep-wake cycle from travel can also affect the balance of bacteria in your microbiota.⁴ To optimize your sleep, establish a regular, relaxing bedtime routine and be consistent with your sleep and wake time. Make sure the room is cool and dark and that there are no electronics with lights visible. And power down all devices 45 minutes before bedtime.

Find ways to de-stress

Chronic stress does a number on your entire body, boosting inflammation and impacting how your digestive tract works. These also lead to changes in your microbiota and may reduce beneficial bacteria.⁴ There is no single best way to manage stress, so it's vital to try different things and see what works for you. Helpful stress-reduction techniques include:

- Exercising, especially outdoors. Try walking, biking, or hiking in the sunshine.
- Doing yoga or tai chi. Sign up for classes or try YouTube videos at home.

- Meditation. Download an app and use it before bed and during the day, especially when you feel stressed.
- Start a gratitude practice. Keep a journal and write down who and what you're grateful for each day.
- Treat yourself to a relaxing massage, take a warm bath, or pamper yourself in some way.

Give your microbiota some extra support

Probiotic supplements contain the same beneficial live bacteria and yeasts as those in your microbiota. When you take probiotics in their recommended amounts, they provide various health benefits. There are different types of probiotics. Some are helpful for general gut or immune support, while others are designed to support a specific microbiota, like in a woman's urogenital tract.

Some probiotics also contain prebiotics. These are compounds that help feed the probiotics. Probiotic blends that contain probiotics are known as synbiotics. Taking the right probiotic can give your microbiota extra support as you work toward a healthy diet and lifestyle changes. Ask your healthcare practitioner which probiotic is best for you.

Eating right and living a healthy lifestyle are the best ways to support the trillions of tiny lives that in your body. Making these positive changes can cause relatively quick improvements in your microbiota and microbiome, which can lead to better health in the long run.

[Learn More.](#)

REFERENCES:

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