



Dietary Management of the Microbiome

The human body is host to trillions of tiny organisms. Those organisms—also called microbes—live on and in the skin, mouth, intestines, nose, lungs, and urinary/genital tract. Collectively these organisms are called the microbiome. While it may sound alarming to learn that the human body houses 10 times more microbial cells than human cells, it's actually perfectly healthy and normal. In fact, the number and diversity of microorganisms living on our body surfaces determines our ability to resist disease. Science is just starting to clarify importance of a healthy microbiome—as well as the illnesses that can result when these organisms get out of balance.

Health Effects

Researchers are finding that differences in the human microbiome can be traced to a number of health conditions. Sometimes imbalances in the body's microorganisms can have an obvious local effect. For example, changes in the organisms that live in the vagina can lead to a yeast infection. However, bacterial imbalances can result in more far-reaching and systemic effects as well, especially where the gut is concerned. Disruption of the organisms in the digestive tract can cause inflammation, and that can damage the intestines. This, in turn, can lead to diseases such as Crohn's disease, diabetes, obesity, allergies, asthma, and more. All of this can, in some cases, be traced back to the bacteria in the intestines!

Treatment Options

Research shows that the fastest way to affect the microbiome is with food. There are different guidelines for people with a healthy microbiome than for those with imbalances. .

Healthy microbiome

To support the diversity and health of the microbiome follow these tips:

- Drink plenty of water.
- Eat whole foods, including fruits, vegetables, healthy fats, and quality protein.
- Include cultured or fermented foods, such as yogurt, kefir, and Kombucha, in your diet.
- Prioritize prebiotic-rich and polyphenol-rich foods. Prebiotics and polyphenols promote the growth of probiotics in the gastrointestinal tract. Prebiotic-rich foods include onions, garlic, leeks, bananas, and honey. Polyphenol-rich foods include apples, onions, chocolate, green tea, and red wine.

Imbalanced microbiome

An imbalance of the microbiome can involve overgrowth of parasites, yeast, fungi, bacteria, or even viruses. If you and your integrative healthcare practitioner determine that you have an imbalanced microbiome, there are several healing diets you may try. A common thread of these diets is that they restrict carbohydrates and prebiotic-rich foods. The reason for that is that bacteria and yeast thrive on those foods. Instead, the diets focus on nonstarchy vegetables, healthy oils, and protein-rich foods. You may also be asked to eliminate foods that commonly contribute to dysbiosis so you can identify any offenders.

Research continues to show us that a healthy microbiome is one of the most important keys to good health. And the good news is that it's attainable through diet. With the help of an integrative health practitioner, you can choose foods that keep you in optimal health.