



International
Microbiota
Observatory



Press release

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The International Microbiota Observatory - 2nd Edition - 2024 A survey of 7,500 people in 11 countries

Awareness of the importance of the microbiota for health is starting to grow, but there is still a long way to go. Healthcare professionals have a key role to play in education and information!

The microbiota, made up of trillions of micro-organisms (bacteria, viruses, fungi, etc.), lives in our intestines, on our skin, and in our mouths, noses, and lungs. These organisms play a crucial role in our well-being by facilitating digestion, stimulating our immune system, and protecting us against infectious diseases. Beyond these functions, however, the microbiota also influences our mood, our metabolism, and even our longevity. Alteration of this delicate balance, often due to factors such as diet, lifestyle or medication, can lead to major health problems, ranging from gastrointestinal disease to cardiovascular disorders and depression. Therefore, maintaining a healthy microbiota in all these areas of the body is essential for our overall health and well-being.*

*For the **second year running**, the Biocodex Microbiota Institute has commissioned Ipsos to conduct a major international survey on the microbiota: **the International Microbiota Observatory**. Do people know more about microbiotas this year? Has their knowledge of the role and functions of the microbiota improved? What role do healthcare professionals play in passing on information about the microbiota to their patients?*

*The survey was conducted by Ipsos among **7,500 people in 11 countries** (France, Spain, Portugal, Poland, Finland, Morocco, United States, Brazil, Mexico, China, and Vietnam). In each country, the sample surveyed is **representative of the country's population aged 18 and over** in terms of gender, age, occupation, and region. The survey was conducted over the Internet between January 26 and February 26, 2024.*

*100 trillion (10¹⁴)



1. Knowledge about the microbiota and its role is progressing worldwide, but it remains a part of the body that is too often misunderstood

- **This year, only 1 in 5 people claim to know exactly what the term "microbiota" means** (23%), but awareness of the term is on the rise (+3 points vs. 2023). Overall, 7 out of 10 people have heard of the microbiota (+7 points vs. 2023).
- **Knowledge of the diversity of microbiotas remains limited, but has also improved compared to last year.** The gut microbiota remains the best-known microbiota: 26% know exactly what it is (+2 points vs. 2023). Next come vaginal microbiota (20%, +3 points vs. 2023), oral microbiota (20%, +2 points vs. 2023), skin microbiota (17%; +1 point vs. 2023), and urinary microbiota (16%, +2 points vs. 2023).
- **The role and functions of the microbiota are also better known than last year:** 78% know that their diet has an impact on the balance of their microbiota (+2 points vs. 2023), and 77% know that an imbalance in their microbiota can, in certain cases, have significant consequences for their health (+2 points vs. 2023).
- **However, we still have a long way to go, particularly in terms of knowledge of the characteristics and composition of the microbiota.** Fewer than 1 in 2 people know that the microbiota is not located exclusively in the gut (46%, +1 point vs. 2023), and 28% know that the microbiota does not consist only of bacteria. Only half of respondents are aware that the microbiota enables the gut to deliver essential health information to the brain (53%, identical to 2023).

2. People are beginning to change their behavior to maintain a balanced microbiota.

- **More than half the population surveyed (58%) say they have already changed their behavior to better protect the balance and proper functioning of their microbiota.** However, this awareness needs to be put into perspective: only 17% do it "a lot," with 2 out of 5 saying they only do it "a little" (41%).
- **The vast majority of respondents claim to have adopted appropriate behaviors, although they often admit to only doing so partially.** A large majority say they eat a balanced and varied diet (84%, but only 33% do so completely), are physically active (78%, but only 35% say they do so completely), avoid smoking (76%), or limit processed foods (75%, but only 26% say they do so completely) to limit the risk of an imbalanced microbiota.

- **On the other hand, certain behaviors more specifically linked to protecting the body's microbiota have not been sufficiently adopted, no doubt due to a lack of knowledge.** 59% say they bathe or shower several times a day, a practice likely to cause dysbiosis (an imbalance in the composition of the microbiota that can lead to numerous health problems), and 42% of women practice vaginal douching, even though this is harmful to their vaginal microbiota.

3. A "golden age for the microbiota"? Parents and 25-44 year-olds are the most knowledgeable about the microbiota, in contrast to seniors

- **Parents of children under 3 and the 25-44 age group are more aware and informed: this is the "golden age for the microbiota."**
- These populations have a greater knowledge of the microbiota: 76% of parents of children under 3, 78% of those aged 25-34, and 75% of those aged 35-44 have heard of the term "microbiota" (vs. 70% overall).
- Parents of young children (68%), those aged 25-34 (67%), and those aged 35-44 (63%) are also the most likely to say they have modified their behavior to protect the balance and proper functioning of their microbiota (vs. 58% overall).
- This is partly due to the role of healthcare professionals in raising awareness of the microbiota. Thus, 58% of parents of children under 3, 55% of those aged 25-34, and 47% of those aged 35-44 have received explanations from their healthcare professionals on what the microbiota is and its role and functions (vs. 45% overall).
- **On the other hand, even though their age exposes them to a growing number of recurring health problems, seniors are the great forgotten age group when it comes to the microbiota**
- Their knowledge of the microbiota is lower: only 61% of those aged 60 and over have ever heard of the microbiota (vs. 70% overall).
- Fewer seniors have changed their behavior to maintain a balanced microbiota (50%, vs. 58% overall).
- The subject is infrequently discussed with healthcare professionals: only a third of seniors have received information from healthcare professionals on the microbiota and its role and functions (34%, vs. 45% overall). What's more, only 1 in 3 has ever received an explanation from their doctor on how to maintain a balanced microbiota (37%, versus 48% overall).



4. Recognized by the world's population as the most reliable source of information on the microbiota, healthcare professionals have a crucial role to play in encouraging their patients to adopt the right behaviors

- **Healthcare professionals are the most credible/legitimate likely source of information:** more than 3 out of 4 respondents consider healthcare professionals to be the most reliable source of information on the microbiota (78%; first source mentioned).
- **Compared with last year, people are more aware of the microbiota thanks to their healthcare professionals, an encouraging development.** As a result, 45% have received an explanation about what the microbiota is, an indicator that is 6 points higher than in 2023. Nearly 1 in 2 have been made aware of the importance of having a balanced microbiota (48%, +6 points vs. 2023). Finally, 48% have received explanations on the right behaviors to adopt to maintain a balanced microbiota (+5 points vs. 2023). **However, while the information provided by professionals has improved this year, it still only reaches a minority of people.**
- **This awareness-raising by healthcare professionals is all the more important, as it has a major impact on patients' knowledge and behavior.** In fact, individuals who have received repeated information from a healthcare professional about the microbiota have a better understanding of it (53% know exactly what it is, vs. 23% overall). They are also more likely to have changed their behavior to maintain a balanced microbiota (95%, vs. 58% overall).

5. The French and microbiota: knowledge on the rise, but behavior to be improved!

- **France is one of the countries where we've seen the greatest progress in knowledge of microbiota.** 33% know exactly what the term "microbiota" means (+6 points vs. 2023, 23% overall), 34% know about the intestinal microbiota (+6 points vs. 2023, 26% overall). Despite some progress, other microbiota are less well known: 25% know precisely the vaginal microbiota (+6 points vs. 2023, 20% overall), 20% know precisely the oral microbiota (+6 points vs. 2023, 20% overall) and 15% know precisely the skin microbiota (+3 points vs. 2023, 17% overall). **Knowledge of the microbiota's characteristics remains very limited:** only 24% know that the microbiota is not made up solely of bacteria (vs. 28% overall), 48% that the microbiota is not located exclusively in the intestines (vs. 46% overall) and 55% that it enables the intestine to deliver essential health information to the brain (vs. 53% overall).
- **Fewer French people than average have changed their behavior to promote a balanced microbiota:** less than half have done so (48% vs. 58% overall), with only 12% claiming to do so a lot. In particular, they consume fewer probiotics (33% vs. 50% overall) and prebiotics (25% vs. 44% overall) than the rest. Conversely, certain good practices are more widely adopted: 74% avoid washing more than once a day (vs. 41% overall).



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- **Faced with these shortcomings, healthcare professionals have a key role to play in educating people about the microbiota**, especially as they are considered by 4 out of 5 French people to be the primary source of reliable information on the microbiota (81%, vs. 78% overall). **Even if the French are becoming better informed about microbiota, this level remains low compared to the rest of the world:** 36% have been informed by their healthcare professional about what microbiota is and what it is used for (+13 points vs. 2023, 45% overall), and 39% have received explanations about the right behaviors to maintain a balanced microbiota (+14 points vs. 2023, 48% overall). Even when antibiotics are prescribed, the level of information is even lower: only 31% of French people have been made aware of the negative consequences of taking antibiotics on the balance of their microbiota (+4 points vs. 2023, 39% overall). Even though the level of information is still too low, **information provided by healthcare professionals has a positive influence on behavior:** 88% of people who have received information from a healthcare professional have changed their behavior to maintain a balanced microbiota (vs. 48% of French people).
- **In France, although the term "microbiota" is better known than in other countries, the behaviors adopted to keep it balanced are still insufficient; it is therefore essential that information be passed on by healthcare professionals.**



About the Biocodex Microbiota Institute

The Biocodex Microbiota Institute is an international knowledge hub dedicated to human microbiotas. Available in 7 languages, the Institute is aimed at both healthcare professionals and the general public, to raise awareness of the vital role that this part of the body plays in our health. The primary mission of the Biocodex Microbiota Institute is educational: to promote the importance of the microbiota for everyone.

www.biocodexmicrobiotainstitute.com/en

Biocodex Microbiota Institute press contact:

Olivier Valcke, Public Relations and Editorial Manager

+33 6 43 61 32 58

o.valcke@biocodex.com

Ipsos press contact:

Etienne Mercier, Director of the Opinion and Health Division - Ipsos

+33 6 23 05 05 17

Etienne.Mercier@ipsos.com