Explorations of Self: The Human Microbiome in Health and Disease

Presented by David A. Relman, M.D.
Thomas C. and Joan M. Merigan Professor
Departments of Medicine, and of Microbiology & Immunology
Stanford University

Tuesday, May 20, 2014 – 7:00 p.m. Lecture

The Arnold and Mabel Beckman Center of the
National Academies of Sciences and Engineering
100 Academy Way, Irvine, CA 92617

Reception immediately following the lecture

Do antibiotics cause long-term harm? Should probiotics be consumed? Should the use of antibacterial gels be limited? How can we use knowledge of the human indigenous microbial communities, or microbiota, to avoid or mitigate disease, and maintain or restore health? Each of our bodies describes an ecological ‘adaptive landscape’ that sustains a variety of influences with impact on our physical well-being. The human microbiota and its collective genes and genomes, aka the ‘human microbiome’, represents many facets unique to each individual. Research into the microbiota reveals unusual patterns of diversity and a true reflection of human individuality. The functions encoded in the microbiome include conserved features and personalized attributes as they relate to each person’s physiology. Numerous associations of altered microbiota composition with disease suggest possible new approaches for diagnosing, understanding and reducing adverse effects on health. Despite a wealth of new insights in the past few years, questions remain about the ecological processes that establish and maintain the human microbiota throughout life, the nature of the interactions and mechanisms that underlie host-microbiota relations, as well as the determinants of recovery from disturbance.
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