



Impact of the dietary modification on GM in metabolic syndrome and obesity: a narrative review

Hemavathi Raghupathi^{1,*} ; Padmapriya Deenadayalan² ; Sukanya³ ; Vijayalakshmi Ravi⁴ ; Parimala Lakshmanan⁴

¹ Saveetha Institute of Medical and Technical Sciences (SIMATS). Saveetha College of Nursing. Department of obstetrics and Gynecological Nursing, Chennai, Tamil Nadu, India.

² Saveetha Institute of Medical and Technical Sciences (SIMATS). Saveetha College of Nursing. Department of obstetrics and Gynecological Nursing, Chennai, Tamil Nadu, India.

³ RR College of Nursing. Department of obstetrics and Gynecological Nursing, Chikkabanavara, Bangalore, Karnataka, India.

⁴ Saveetha Institute of Medical and Technical Sciences (SIMATS). Saveetha College of Nursing, Chennai, Tamil Nadu, India.

*Corresponding author: Hemavathi Raghupathi.

Saveetha Institute of Medical and Technical Sciences (SIMATS). Saveetha College of Nursing. Department of obstetrics and Gynecological Nursing, Chennai, Tamil Nadu, India.

E-mail: hemavathi24@yahoo.com

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Abstract

Introduction: Obesity and metabolic syndrome (MetS) are emerging public health problems globally and risk factors for cardiovascular diseases, nonalcoholic fatty liver disease and type 2 diabetes mellitus. **Objective:** The purpose of this review was to investigate the relation between GM and dietary modification in obesity and the metabolic syndrome, and the role of dietary modification in obesity and metabolic syndrome prevention and treatment. **Methods:** A narrative review of published data was performed, using peer-reviewed studies that included "gut microbiota," "dietary pattern," "obesity" and/or "metabolic syndrome," "microbiota-targeted interventions. Appropriate findings were aggregated to analyse the interface amongst sustenance, gut microbial structure and metabolic well-being. **Results:** GM plays a key role in digestion, synthesis of short chain fatty acids, active role in immune system, vitamin synthesis, and energy homeostasis. Dysbiosis, defined by a decrease in the diversity of microorganisms and a change in the composition of the community, is linked to obesity and metabolic syndrome in various ways such as increase in energy harvest, metabolic endotoxemia, chronic inflammation, impairment of the barrier function, and insulin resistance. A pro-dysbiotic diet in the West has been

shown to cause imbalances in the microbial community and dysmetabolism, while consumption of high fiber, plant-rich diets with prebiotics and some low carbohydrate diets have shown to be beneficial for the microbial population and dysmetabolism. New treatment strategies include probiotics, gut microbiome transfer, bariatric surgery and precision nutrition, which appear to be useful in the rebalancing of the microbiota. **Conclusion:** Modulating gut microbes with foodstuffs is a powerful, non-drug approach to enhancing metabolic and nutritional outcomes and could help decrease the burden of obesity and related comorbidities.

Keywords: Dietary modulation; Mediterranean diet; Short-chain fatty acids; Dysbiosis; Precision nutrition; Probiotics; Prebiotics.

Introduction

Obesity and metabolic syndrome (MetS) are inseparably associated conditions, which together form a worldwide epidemic with severe consequences for morbidity, mortality, and the cost of health services [1,2]. The metabolic syndrome is a group of metabolic disorders that consist of three or more of five metabolic abnormalities, including central obesity,

high concentration of fasting blood glucose, hypertension, high serum triglycerides, and low serum high-density lipoprotein (HDL) cholesterol. These risk factors are likely to be co-occurring and further increase the risk associated with cardiovascular disease (CVD) and diabetes [3-5].

Current strategies for obesity and MetS, such as caloric restriction, augmentation of physical activity, use of pharmacotherapy, and bariatric surgery, have shown limited long-term success and can have detrimental side effects [6 -8]. The gut microbiota (GM) is made of bacteria, viruses, and fungi, which are important for the development of essential functions such as the immune system, vitamin synthesis, and bioactive metabolite production [9,10]. Dysbiosis of this microbial community has been observed to be consistently linked via multiple mechanisms such as altered energy extraction, increased intestinal permeability, systemic low-grade inflammation, and impaired insulin signaling [11-13].

Dietary macro and micronutrients have distinct effects on microbial community composition, bile acid synthesis, and key metabolite levels. Hence, it is crucial to understand how certain dietary patterns and components influence GM relation to obesity and MetS to develop evidence-based nutritional interventions [14-16].

The purpose of this review was to investigate the relation between GM and dietary modification in obesity and the metabolic syndrome, and the role of dietary modification in obesity and metabolic syndrome prevention and treatment.

Methods

A narrative literature review was performed, to explore the link between dietary changes, gut microbiome, obesity and metabolic syndrome. Suitable articles were gathered by searching electronic databases of PubMed, Scopus, Web of Science and google scholar. Only peer-reviewed studies in English on gut microbiota, dietary patterns, obesity, metabolic syndrome, and interventions for targeting the microbiota were included. The eligible studies were discussed and the findings analyzed, synthesized, and organized into the following themes: gut microbiota composition and function, dysbiosis in obesity and metabolic syndrome, diet and gut microbiota, metabolites produced by the microbiota, therapeutic approaches, and comorbidities. These findings were critically analysed and current evidence around the potential for dietary modulation on gut microbiota, and subsequent metabolic health summarized.

Results

The intestinal microbiota: composition, diversity and core functions

The Human GM- Overview

The human gut microbiota (GM) is a very diverse and complex ecosystem composed of roughly 10¹³ to 10¹⁴ microorganisms. Four of the phyla are predominant and make up the majority of the microbial population: bacteria and proteobacteria. Dietary intake is the primary influence on GM composition, accounting for nearly 60% of the overall differences and highlighting the importance of diet in the shaping of microbial communities [17,18].

The GM renders several essential physiological functions, such as digestion, fermentation of food fibers that produce short-chain fatty acids (SCFAs), vitamin synthesis, metabolism of bile acids, and shaping growth and immunity. Moreover, it is involved in the formation of bioactive compounds that act on the nervous system, thereby influencing the gut-brain interaction. Of great relevance is the fact that the GM also seems to play a major role in the regulation of energy homeostasis; this role refers to the mechanisms of fat storage and energy extraction from the food consumed [19].

Factors impacting the composition of the Intestinal Microbiota

Only 5-10% of the differences in bacterial taxonomy are due to genetic differences; most are due to environmental factors, mainly diet. The foundations of the microbiota are set early in life, with mode of delivery, breastfeeding, and maternal diet during pregnancy being important determinants of their metabolic health implications [20].

Another important factor changing GM diversity is antibiotic consumption, as microbiota community structure can change after even brief antibiotic courses. The microbiota is regulated by a multitude of elements, not only food. These factors include smoking, physical activity, stress, and sleep hygiene, among others [21].

GM Dysbiosis in Obesity and Metabolic Syndrome

Obesity is associated with dysbiosis in gut microbiota, characterized by a decrease in microbial variety and alterations in microbial composition. An imbalance in the Firmicutes-to-Bacteroidetes ratio in obese people has been reported and could lead to greater harvest of dietary energy and weight gain. The essential function of GM in obesity is underlined by these microbial alterations, which can contribute to

insulin resistance and metabolic dysfunction as well as impair gut barrier function and promote chronic low-grade inflammation [21,22]. Obesity is linked with changes in the composition of microbes and reduced diversity, as well as an increase of pathogenic taxa. Summarized characteristic features of GM dysbiosis are displayed in Figure 1.

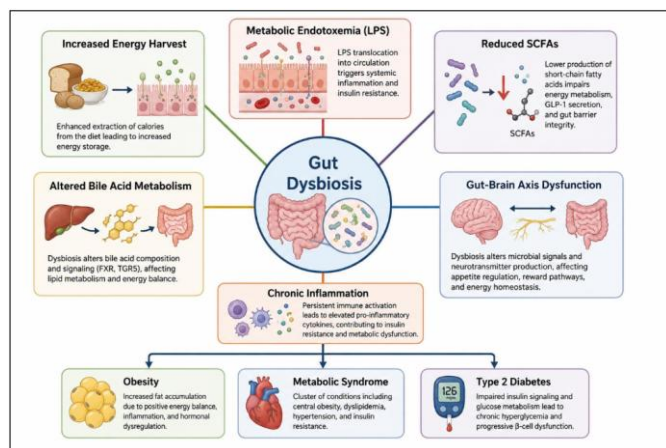


Figure 1. Characterized by gut microbiota dysbiosis. Source: Own authorship.

Dietary habits and their impacts

The western diet

Adopting a Western diet (high utilization of refined carbohydrates, saturated fat, trans fat, red and processed meats, and ultra-processed food with low dietary fiber, fruits, and vegetables) is strongly linked to GM dysbiosis and obesity and MetS. A high-fat diet (HFD) causes an abrupt and significant shift in GM composition with an increase in *Proteobacteria* and *Desulfovibrio* and a decrease in *Akkermansia muciniphila* and *Bifidobacterium* as well as a decrease in microbial diversity [23,24].

Excessive amounts of refined carbohydrates and added sugars also affect gut bacteria by increasing the populations of disease-causing bacteria while decreasing the populations of fiber-fermenting and SCFA-producing gut bacteria. The Western diet is also known to decrease the amount of butyrate and other SCFAs, which in turn can lead to a decrease in intestinal barrier function and therefore metabolic endotoxemia. Adults with a Western diet have an increased risk for obesity and other conditions such as cardiovascular disease, MetS, and NAFLD [25].

High Fiber Diets and Prebiotics

Dietary fiber and prebiotics are important modulators of GM and are important to prevent obesity and metabolic syndrome. Fiber strengthens *Bifidobacterium*, *Lactobacillus*, *Roseburia*, and *Faecalibacterium prausnitzii* which helps regulate appetite. Studies have also shown a relationship

between a high-fiber diet and increased satiety, lower intake of energy, better insulin sensitivity, and weight management, which emphasizes the potential of fiber in preventing obesity and metabolic syndrome [26,27].

Ketogenic Diet

A ketogenic diet is an excess-fat and low-carbohydrate diet that causes a metabolic state of ketosis, and it is linked with weight loss and glycemic control. KD has been shown to affect the gut microbiota by increasing beneficial microorganisms like *Akkermansia muciniphila* and *Lactobacillus* species and altering gut-brain signals and metabolic processes [28].

Plant-Based and Vegan/Veggie Diets

Individuals who follow plant-based diets have significantly higher gut microbial diversity and an abundance of beneficial bacteria. They have a rich fiber content and encourage the production of SCFA, which helps maintain metabolic health; at the same time, the intake of animal products is low, which helps reduce harmful metabolites. These benefits vary by the quality and variety of plant foods that are eaten [29].

Less Carbohydrate and Excess-Fat Diets

Low-fat, excess-carbohydrate (LCHF) diets have been documented to enhance insulin reactivity, body weight, and glycemic control and thus may be beneficial for obesity, metabolic dysfunction, and type 2 diabetes. But too much of the wrong kinds of fats can negatively affect gut microbiota by lowering microbial diversity and increasing the number of potentially pathogenic bacteria in the gut. It matters which type of dietary fat you consume, as omega-3 fatty acids tend to promote a healthier gut microbiota, while saturated fats tend to be more linked to dysbiosis and negative metabolic effects [30-35].

Gut microbiota-derived metabolites and metabolic health

Bile acids

Bile acids contain derivatives of cholesterol that play a role in assimilating lipid and regulating metabolism. Primary bile acids are transformed to secondary ones through gut microbiota, both of which activate FXR and TGR5, effecting glucose, lipid and energy balance.

However, the process can be disturbed by dysbiosis which is linked with metabolic syndrome, type 2 diabetes and with NAFLD. These interactions suggest that bile acid-microbiota pathways could be a

therapeutic target for cardiometabolic diseases [36-39].

Therapeutics interventions for gut microbiota

Gut microbiome transfer (GMT)

The process of GMT involves transferring the microbiota of a donor's healthy gut to a patient's, with the aim of rebalancing the microbiota. Preliminary studies indicate that GMT from lean donors can enhance insulin sensitivity and boost the levels of guardedly health-promoting bacteria that produce butyrate in people with obesity and metabolic syndrome. But its weight loss and anti-inflammatory properties have been inconsistent, and more study should be conducted to determine the best donor, preparation and application procedures [40,41].

Bariatric Surgery and Gut Microbiota

Bariatric surgeries are successful interventions for severe obesity, and they trigger huge changes in the structure of gut microbiota. These include an increased population of beneficial bacteria, e.g. *Akkermansia muciniphila*, and synthesis of short-chain fatty acids leading towards beneficial metabolic effects. The alterations of microbiota species composition that have been reported after bariatric surgery may explain the greater impact of this surgery on weight loss and metabolic health as compared to classic lifestyle changes as a weight loss approach [42].

Precision Nutrition and Personalized Microbiota Based Interventions

Precision nutrition seeks to ensure that dietary advice is personalized on the basis of the composition of an individual's gut microbiome, his or her DNA, and metabolic features. Through improvements in microbiome sequencing technologies and the utilization of bioinformatics, personalized diet, probiotics, and prebiotics can be developed that aim to influence the growth of beneficial microbes and boost outcomes in metabolic health. This new method may be used to prevent and treat obesity and metabolic syndrome, but it needs to be standardized and validated clinically [43]. Precision nutrition is an exciting future trajectory for microbiome research, combining interventions with microbiome, genetic, metabolic and lifestyle information to offer personalized nutrition advice (Figure 2).

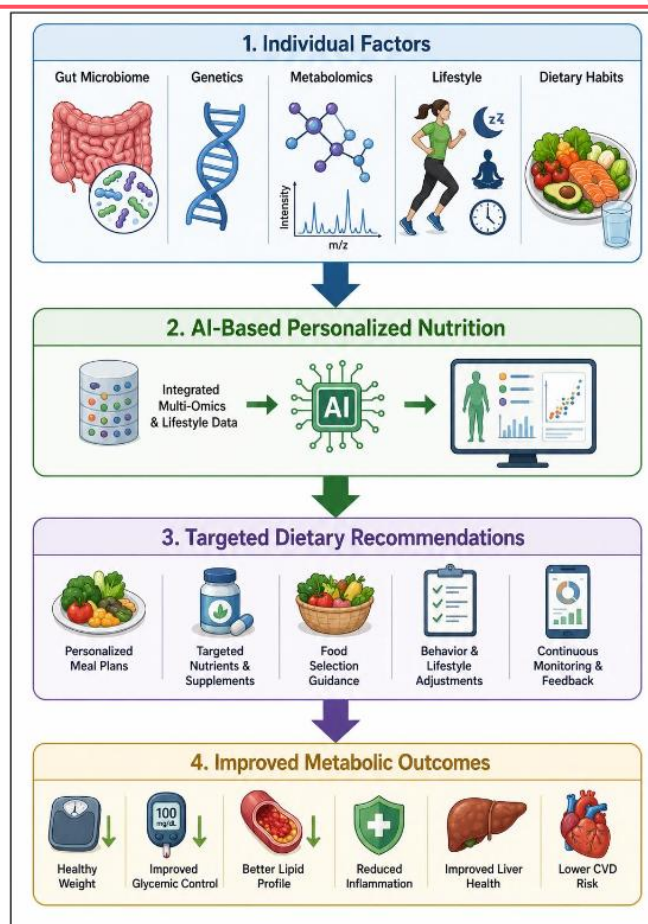


Figure 2. The precision nutrition framework. Source: Own authorship.

Intestinal microbiota and comorbidities

Type 2 diabetes mellitus

GM is central in the pathogenesis of T2DM and dysbiosis leads to the disruption of insulin sensitivity, chronic inflammation and alteration of glucose metabolism. Dietary therapies like probiotics, a high-fiber diet, and the Mediterranean diet have enhanced insulin sensitivity and glycemic management in people with type 2 diabetes and prediabetes [44,45].

Cardiovascular disease

GM dysbiosis is associated to cardiovascular risk via various mechanisms such as an increase in TMAO production, an imbalance in bile acid metabolism, systemic inflammation and endothelial function. Studies suggests that the GM influences atherosclerosis risk factors including insulin resistance, dyslipidaemia, and inflammation. Furthermore, chemicals generated by gut microorganisms have revealed novel disease pathways. There are dietetic interventions that favorably modulate GM such as high fiber and Mediterranean diet, which are known to decrease cardiovascular risk [46].

Polycystic Ovary Syndrome and Endocrine Disorders

Dysbiosis in the GM causes polycystic ovarian syndrome (PCOS) in women who are overweight or have a high-fat diet. This leads to an overproduction of androgens by the ovaries, an overactive immune system, inflammation, and insulin resistance in the follicles. Some probiotic strains have been shown to be beneficial in clinical studies in diabetes and various metabolic disorders such as obesity and PCOS. Re-establishment of bacterial microbiota with fecal transplant has been suggested to improve or prevent pathologies like diabetes mellitus, MetS, and PCOS [47,48].

Discussion

The present review aims at emphasizing the importance of GM in obesity and metabolic syndrome pathogenesis and prevention. What these microorganisms in the human gut are able to do are vital functions such as digestion, production of short chain fatty acids (SCFAs), vitamin synthesis, immune regulation and energy homeostasis functions. Dietary intake is known to be the major factor influencing the variation amongst different individuals in their GM diversity and constitutes a significant part of the interindividual variability [17-19].

GM dysbiosis is well known to be associated with obesity and metabolic syndrome. Decreased microbial diversity, microbial changes and imbalance in Bacteroides/Firmicutes ratio has been associated with the increase in the energy harvest, weight gain, insulin resistance, impaired gut barrier function and chronic low-grade inflammation [21,22]. These findings corroborate the idea that dysbiosis plays an important role in metabolic dysfunction and the risk of cardiometabolic conditions.

Food and feeding habits can have an enormous impact on the gut microbiota. High consumption of saturated fats, refined carbs, or ultra processed food leads to dysbiosis, increased intestinal permeability, endotoxemia and systemic inflammation which in turn increases risk of obesity and metabolic syndrome [24,25]. On the other hand, high fiber, plant-based and prebiotic-rich food contributes to the growth of beneficial bacteria, promoting the production of SCFA, improvement in insulin sensitivity and weight management [26-29].

Recent treatment techniques like probiotics, transfer of the microbiome, bariatric surgery, and precision nutrition have shown promise in reconstitution of microbial balance and in better metabolic outcomes [40-44]. In addition, modulation

of Intestinal Microbiota decreases the risk of obesity-related comorbidities such as type 2 diabetes mellitus, cardiovascular disease and polycystic ovary syndrome [45-48]. Altogether, these data indicate that a modulation of the GM by diet is a sustainable and promising way of preventing and managing obesity and metabolic syndrome.

Limitations

This narrative review is limited by its non-systematic methodology, which may introduce selection bias. The included studies vary in design, population, dietary interventions, and microbiota assessment methods, limiting direct comparisons and the generalizability of findings. Additionally, the review does not provide a quantitative synthesis or meta-analysis of the available evidence.

Future directions

Finally, dietary modulation of gut microbes in obesity and metabolic syndrome is an emerging and very active field that offers numerous possibilities for research and applications. One of the key points to look ahead is precision nutrition approaches, incorporating microbiome, genetic, metabolic, lifestyle, and dietary data. These customized approaches could enable individualized dietary interventions that could better shift the gut microbiome composition toward a healthier metabolic profile in obese people and those with metabolic syndrome.

More research is required to examine the therapeutic potential of next generation strains of probiotics like *A. muciniphila* and *F. prausnitzii*, two species of bacteria that have been seen to have a positive effect on metabolism. Other emerging application areas for FMT include optimization of application protocols and the development of microbiota-targeted therapies for obesity and metabolic syndrome. In the near future, we can expect to see that the new frontier of clinical nutrition, namely microbiome science, will be a big part in preventing and managing metabolic disorders.

Conclusion

The GM plays a vital role in metabolic health and is closely linked to obesity and metabolic syndrome. Dysbiosis contributes to increased energy harvest, chronic inflammation, impaired gut barrier function, insulin resistance, and metabolic dysfunction. Diet strongly influences gut microbiota composition, with Western diets promoting dysbiosis, while high-fiber, plant-based, and prebiotic-rich diets support beneficial microorganisms and improve metabolic health.

Emerging interventions, including probiotics, gut microbiome transfer, bariatric surgery, and precision nutrition, show promise in restoring microbial balance. Overall, dietary modulation of the GM is a practical strategy for preventing and managing obesity, metabolic syndrome, and related metabolic disorders.

CRediT

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Conflict of Interest

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