



Press release

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## **The International Microbiota Observatory, 3rd Edition, 2025 Microbiota Momentum: Bridging Awareness and Action**

**An increasing knowledge of the vaginal microbiota, its role and its functions but persistent challenges in behavioral implementation.**

For the **third year running**, the Biocodex Microbiota Institute has commissioned Ipsos to conduct a major international survey on microbiota: the **International Microbiota Observatory**. This large survey was conducted by Ipsos among **7,500 people in 11 countries** (the USA, Brazil, Mexico, France, Germany, Italy, Portugal, Poland, Finland, China and Vietnam). Within each country, a **representative sample of the population aged 18 y.o. and over was interviewed**. Representativeness was ensured by the quota method applied to the respondent's gender, age, region and occupation. The survey was conducted online, from January 21 to February 28, 2025. Within this sample, **3,862 women were interviewed**. Changes are shown on a like-for-like basis since 2023.

Vaginal microbiota is essential for women's health. But how well is it known by women? What behaviors do they adopt to preserve it? What information do their healthcare professionals provide them? The third wave of this study shows an increasing awareness and knowledge of the vaginal microbiota, its role, and its functions. However, it also highlights that some knowledge about the functioning of the vaginal microbiota has not progressed in 2 years. There is still limited awareness from healthcare professionals. This awareness now needs to be strengthened and extended to all women.

## 1. The vaginal microbiota: an increasingly understood organ

- **The awareness and understanding of the vaginal microbiota continue to grow, with one in four women (24%) now claiming to know exactly what the vaginal microbiota is—a 5-point increase since 2023.** This rising trend in recognition is encouraging, yet the knowledge remains largely superficial. Nearly half of all women have never heard of the vaginal microbiota (46%), although this figure has decreased by 8 points compared to 2023.
- Despite gaps in overall awareness, **there is a good understanding of certain key aspects of the vaginal microbiota.** A significant majority of women—72%—recognize that antibiotics can alter the vaginal microbiota (+1 point versus 2024), and 68% understand the impact of vaginal dryness or dehydration on it (steady versus 2024). Furthermore, two-thirds of women are aware of the vaginal microbiota's crucial role as a protective barrier against pathogenic microorganisms (+1 point versus 2023).
- **Knowledge in some areas is progressing.** There's a growing recognition - up 9 points since 2023 - that each woman's vaginal microbiota is unique, with 66% of women now aware of this fact. Similarly, 60% of women understand that the vaginal microbiota undergoes changes throughout a woman's life, also showing a 9-point increase since 2023.
- **However, significant knowledge gaps persist, particularly regarding factors that influence the vaginal microbiota, with no substantial progress observed over the past two years.** Only 55% of women are aware that smoking can affect their vaginal microbiota, a figure that has decreased by 1 point since 2024. Even fewer—just 45%—understand the connection between the gut microbiota and the vaginal microbiota (+1 point since 2024).

## 2. Bridging the gap between awareness and action

**The adoption of behaviors aimed at protecting the vaginal microbiota presents a mixed picture. While some positive habits are widely embraced, others remain less common, and certain practices that may affect vaginal health persist.**

- A significant majority of women (84%) wear cotton underwear (+1 point vs 2023), a practice that has remained largely steady. There's been a notable increase in women avoiding self-medication, with 66% of them doing so (+5 points vs 2024).
- However, other beneficial behaviors are less widely adopted. The use of a soap-free cleansing solution remains at 56% of women (-1 point vs 2023).
- Some behaviors that could affect vaginal microbiota continue to be part of women's routines. Vaginal douching, while showing a decrease over the past two years, is still practiced by more than one-third of women (38%, -4 points vs 2023).

The practice of sleeping with underwear remains common, with 55% of women doing so (+3 points vs 2023). And more than half of women (54%) wash their body several times a day, which can be detrimental to vaginal microbiota health.

### 3. Women seek guidance from healthcare professionals

- **Despite the crucial role of the vaginal microbiota in women's health, only a minority of women receive comprehensive information from their healthcare providers on this topic.** Only 37% of women have received information about the vaginal microbiota, its role, and functions (+1 point vs 2023). Slightly more encouraging is that 42% have received explanations on how important it is to best preserve their vaginal microbiota (+2 points vs 2023). Additionally, 42% report that healthcare professionals educate them on the good behaviours to adopt in order to maintain a good balance within their vaginal microbiota (+1 point vs 2023). **While these figures show marginal increases from the previous year, they still underscore a significant gap in healthcare communication.**
- **The demand for knowledge, however, is overwhelmingly clear.** A large majority of women, 85%, express a desire to receive more information from their healthcare professionals about the importance of the vaginal microbiota and its impact on health (+3 points vs 2023). **This growing interest highlights a critical need for enhanced education and communication in this topic.**
- **Receiving professional guidance has been shown to positively influence microbiota awareness and the adoption of good habits. Women who have received repeated and comprehensive information from healthcare professionals demonstrate markedly better awareness and healthier habits.** Women who have received repeated and multiple information on microbiota from healthcare professionals have a better understanding of the term “vaginal microbiota”: 56% know exactly what the vaginal microbiota is, compared to only 24% of women overall. They also show a heightened awareness of the vaginal microbiota's importance to women's health, with 90% recognizing its crucial role versus 78% of the general female population.
- This improved understanding translates into the adoption of healthier practices. Women who have received professional guidance are more likely to engage in behaviors that support vaginal microbiota health:
  - o 64% sleep without underwear (compared to 45% among all women)
  - o 93% wear cotton underwear (versus 84% among all women)
  - o 80% use a soap-free cleaning solution (as opposed to 56% among all women).

#### 4. Age: a determining factor in vaginal microbiota awareness

**This year's findings continue to highlight that women aged 60 and above remain the least informed and aware about the vaginal microbiota. Paradoxically, they unknowingly adopt certain beneficial behaviors that support their microbiota.**

- In terms of awareness, only 19% of women aged 60 and above know exactly what vaginal microbiota is, compared to 24% overall.
- Knowledge gaps persist regarding the role and functions of the vaginal microbiota among older women. Barely half (53%) of women aged 60 and above know that the vagina is self-cleaning (vs 58% of all women), and only 40% are aware that bacterial vaginosis is associated with an imbalance in the vaginal microbiota (vs 44% of all women).
- However, the picture is more nuanced, with older women showing better knowledge in some areas. For instance, 78% know that antibiotics can alter the vaginal microbiota (vs 72% of all women), and 70% are aware that the vaginal microbiota acts as a barrier protecting against pathogenic microorganisms (vs 66% of all women).
- Women aged 60 and above also stand out in adopting certain behaviors to preserve vaginal microbiota balance. Three out of four avoid self-medication (76%, vs 66% of all women), and 69% avoid vaginal douching (vs 62% of all women). However, they are less likely to sleep without underwear (40%, vs 45% of all women).
- Notably, this demographic receives less education from healthcare professionals: less than a third of women aged 60 and above have had the vaginal microbiota, its role, and functions explained by a healthcare professional (29%, vs 37% of all women).

**Young women and new mothers: more informed about vaginal microbiota: they demonstrate a higher level of awareness and knowledge about the vaginal microbiota. However, they do not necessarily adopt beneficial behaviors.**

- Among these groups, 62% of 25-34-year-olds and 68% of young mothers know what the vaginal microbiota is, compared to 54% of women overall. These demographics also show better understanding of vaginal health: 66% of both groups know that the vagina is self-cleaning (vs 58% of all women).
- They are also more aware that the mode of delivery could impact the newborn's gut microbiota, with 47% of 25-34-year-olds and 56% of young mothers recognizing this fact (vs 41% of all women).
- The increased awareness in these groups may be attributed to more frequent interactions with healthcare professionals: 44% of 25-34-year-olds and 57% of young mothers have received information about the vaginal microbiota role and functions from a healthcare professional, compared to 37% of women overall.



- In terms of beneficial practices, these groups are more likely to sleep without underwear: 49% of 25-34-year-olds and 57% of young mothers do so, compared to 45% of women overall.
- However, they struggle with other beneficial behaviors and are more likely to engage in some potentially harmful practices: 42% of 25-34-year-olds and 50% of young mothers practice vaginal douching, compared to 38% of women overall and 40% of 25-34yo and 53% of young mothers practice self-medication, compared to 34% overall.

#### **About the Biocodex Microbiota Institute**

The Biocodex Microbiota Institute is an international hub of knowledge dedicated to microbiota. The Institute educates the lay public and healthcare professionals on the importance of microbiota on healthcare and well-being.

[www.biocodexmicrobiotainstitute.com/en](http://www.biocodexmicrobiotainstitute.com/en)

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