International Microbiota Observatory

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International Microbiota Observatory – 4th Edition - 2026

A survey conducted among 7,500 individuals in 11 countries

Building better microbiota understanding and healthier routines by partnering with healthcare professionals

*The **fourth wave of the International Microbiota Observatory** was conducted this year. Once again, Ipsos bva has been commissioned by the Biocodex Microbiota Institute to conduct this major international survey on microbiota. Are individuals more aware of microbiota and its diversity this year? How are healthcare professionals involved in the microbiota education of their patients? What do people understand about microbiota? How are they protecting their microbiota? What do parents and pregnant women know about the first 1,000 days of life?*

*This large survey was conducted by Ipsos bva 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 February 3rd to March 13th, 2026. The 2026 Observatory highlights a growing global interest in microbiota — but also a worrying gap between awareness, understanding and action. While healthcare professionals remain the most trusted source of information, fewer people report receiving microbiota education from them this year, despite its proven impact on healthier behaviors. To better assess these behaviors, a new Gut Microbiota Index was developed, revealing that **only one-third of respondents consistently adopt habits considered beneficial for maintaining a balanced gut microbiota.***

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1. Awareness of all microbiota types is on the rise

- **In 2026, more than 7 out of 10 people are familiar with the term "microbiota"** (72%, +1 point vs 2025). Still, only one quarter of respondents have a precise awareness of the term (24%, +1 point vs 2025).
- **Awareness of microbiota diversity has significantly increased compared to last year**: **more than 2 out of 3 respondents have already heard of at least one microbiota** (68%), **a significant increase of 6 points since 2025**. More specifically, respondents show greater awareness of all types of microbiota compared to last year: 63% of respondents have heard of gut microbiota (+6 points vs 2025), 52% of oral microbiota (+4 points vs 2025), 51% of vaginal microbiota (+2 points vs 2025), and 50% of skin microbiota (+4 points vs 2025). Even the lesser-known microbiota types are showing signs of improvement: 46% of respondents have heard of urinary microbiota (+3 points vs 2025), 45% about ENT microbiota (+3 points vs 2025) and 44% about lung microbiota (+3 points vs 2025).

2. Healthcare professionals remain trusted — but talk less about microbiota

- **Healthcare professionals remain the most reliable and sought-after source for microbiota information:** 94% declared they would trust a healthcare professional for relevant and trustworthy information about microbiota (stable vs 2025).
- **But microbiota-related information from healthcare professionals remains limited: only half of respondents report receiving information** (50%). What's even more concerning is the decrease observed compared to last year: **fewer respondents have been educated by healthcare professionals in 2026**, a 5-point decrease vs 2025. In detail, 39% have had an explanation about microbiota, its role and functions, a decrease of 3 points compared to 2025. Even practical advice about microbiota has been received less often this year: 43% of respondents have been educated about the importance of preserving as much as possible the balance of their microbiota (-4 points vs 2025), and 43% have had explanations about appropriate behaviors to maintain the balance of their microbiota (-3 points vs 2025).
- **These results appear even more disturbing considering the core role healthcare professionals play as microbiota educators.** When people have received multiple pieces of information about microbiota from their healthcare professionals, they appear to have a better understanding of it (54% know exactly what microbiota is, compared to 24% among all respondents). They are also more likely to have changed their behaviors to protect the balance of their microbiota (85%, vs 53% among all respondents).
- **Even with an antibiotic prescription, most respondents did not receive guidance from their healthcare professionals**. Only 45% have had information about digestive disorders associated with antibiotics (-1 point vs 2025) and 39% about the negative consequences of antibiotics on the balance of their microbiota (stable vs 2025). The point of antibiotic prescribing is a missed teachable moment. Most patients leave without guidance: only 36% of respondents have received advice on how to limit the

negative consequences of taking antibiotics on their microbiota, a 2-point decrease since 2025.

3. From knowledge to action: the missing step in microbiota health

- **Knowledge about microbiota shows no signs of improvement this year, whether regarding its role, capabilities, or importance**: 79% of respondents are aware about the impact diet can have on the balance of their microbiota (-1 point vs 2025), 77% know a microbiota imbalance can have significant health consequences (-2 points vs 2025), and 76% recognize the importance of microbiota in immune defense mechanisms (stable vs 2025).
- **Most specific aspects of microbiota remain poorly understood, especially regarding its impact on various diseases**: only 40% know that microbiota influences how a person's body responds to cancer therapies, and 23% are aware of a link between some respiratory allergies and a gut microbiota imbalance.

- **Microbiota-protective behaviors appear to be rarely adopted.** Only half of respondents have changed their behaviors to protect their microbiota (53%), a 3-point decrease compared to last year. **And barely 13% declare they have changed their behaviors "a lot" for their microbiota balance, a 3-point decrease since 2025**. Moreover, while 59% of respondents consider their gut microbiota to be currently well balanced, **only a minority of 13% consider it to be "completely" balanced**.
- **On the one hand, general health-protective behaviors are adopted by a majority of respondents**: 85% avoid drinking alcohol more than once a week, 73% practice physical activity at least once a week, 63% eat red meat weekly or less frequently.
- **However, the microbiota-related behaviors most beneficial for a healthy microbiota are the least likely to be adopted by respondents**: only 44% of respondents consume fermented foods several times a week or more often, 40% eat multiple fruits and vegetables on a daily basis, and 34% avoid consuming ultra processed food more than once a month.
- A Gut Microbiota Index was developed based on nine protective behaviors that benefit gut microbiota. Experts reached a consensus on how frequently each behavior should be practiced to be classified as 'poor,' 'medium,' or 'good' for maintaining gut microbiota balance. A specific ranking was also assigned to emphasize their importance for gut health. Consequently, respondents were divided into three categories: 34% are classified as having good adoption of gut microbiota-protective behaviors, while 49% are medium adopters, and 17% exhibit low adoption levels.
- **Those who engage the most in gut microbiota-beneficial behaviors are more likely to be aware of microbiota**. They show higher understanding of microbiota: 77% know what microbiota is, vs 64% among those who have a low adoption of gut microbiota-protective behaviors. Moreover, they have received more guidance from their healthcare professionals: 38% have had information about microbiota, vs 27% among those who have a low adoption of gut microbiota-protective behaviors.

- **Results illustrate the direct impact of microbiota-related medical information**: a decline in information provided by healthcare professionals might have significant consequences for the persistently weak microbiota knowledge and the low adoption of gut microbiota-protective behaviors.

4. The first 1,000 days: a critical window still poorly understood

- **A weak awareness of the scientific concept of the "first 1,000 days of life"**: 43% of parents and pregnant women have already heard of the concept, with only 15% who know exactly what it is.
- **Knowledge is anchored to antibiotics**: 65% of parents and pregnant women are aware of the impact taking antibiotics can have on the development of their child's gut microbiota.
- **Beyond this, parents and pregnant women show limited understanding of their child's microbiota**: only 38% know that pet exposure during early life does influence the gut microbiota, 38% are aware that children in urban areas do not necessarily have a more balanced microbiota than those in rural areas, and 29% are aware that by the age of 5, a child's gut microbiota becomes similar to that of an adult. Barely 11% know that a baby's microbiota starts developing at birth.
- **Few parents have received professional guidance about their child's microbiota**. In details, 62% of parents have had education about the significant role of breastfeeding for their child's microbiota, 57% have received information about the importance of preserving the balance of their child's microbiota to prevent future diseases, and 55% have had explanation on how an antibiotic prescription can affect the microbiota health of their child and how to mitigate these negative effects. **Barely 39% of parents have been educated by their pediatrician about microbiota development in the first 1,000 days**.
- **Once informed about the concept of the first 1,000 days of life, parents demonstrate a better understanding of child's microbiota**. 73% know that antibiotics have a significant impact on the development of gut microbiota (vs 61% among those not educated by HCPs). 48% know that by five years of age, gut microbiota becomes similar to that of an adult (vs 17% among those not educated by HCPs). 42% know that pet exposure during early life does influence the gut microbiota (vs 35% of those not educated by HCPs).

5. Young parents know more about microbiota — seniors protect it better

- **Young parents: a better awareness of microbiota, yet this doesn't translate into their behaviors.** 79% of parents aged 25 to 44 y.o. have already heard about microbiota, compared to 72% overall. They also show more awareness about the diversity of microbiota: 70% have heard about gut microbiota (vs 63% overall), 64% about oral microbiota (vs 52% overall), and 62% about vaginal microbiota (vs 51% overall).

- Yet, they show a moderate level of knowledge about microbiota: 75% are aware of the significant role of microbiota in immune defense mechanisms (vs 76% overall), 69% know that many diseases (irritable bowel syndrome, obesity, vaginosis) could be linked to microbiota (vs 68% overall), and 62% know that microbiota enables the gut to deliver essential information to the brain for our health (vs 60% overall).
- **However, parents aged 25 to 44 show misconceptions about protecting the balance of their microbiota.**
- **They're less likely than average to adopt protective-microbiota behaviors**: 55% avoid eating red meat more than once a week (vs 63% among all respondents), 34% eat multiple fruits and vegetables daily (vs 40% among all respondents), and 23% avoid consuming ultra processed food more than once a month (vs 34% among all respondents).
- **A mistaken belief about microbiota balance:** 68% of parents aged 25 to 44 consider their own microbiota to be currently well-balanced, a higher result compared to the average (59%).

- **Seniors: a population less educated on microbiota, but more likely to adopt protective behaviors**
- 67% of respondents aged 60 y.o. and over have already heard about microbiota, compared to 72% among all respondents.
- **They appear to be less educated on microbiota compared to the average**: only 37% know that microbiota does influence how a person's body responds to cancer therapies (vs 40% overall), and 20% are aware that respiratory allergies can be associated with an imbalance in the gut microbiota (vs 23% overall).
- **A higher adoption of protective behaviors**: respondents aged 60 y.o. and over are more likely to eat multiple fruits and vegetables on a daily basis (49%, vs 40% overall), to avoid consuming ultra processed food more than once a month (48%, vs 34% overall), and to consume fermented food several times a week or more often (47%, vs 44%).

6. Countries show striking differences in microbiota education and behaviors

- **Significant differences of microbiota awareness between countries**: Vietnam (93%), France (86%) and Italy (77%) are more likely than average to have already heard about microbiota. On the contrary, awareness about microbiota is lower in Finland (52%), Portugal (66%), the US (67%) and China (68%).
- **In Asia, respondents have received professional guidance on microbiota and have adopted several microbiota-protective behaviors**. They are more likely to have had education on microbiota (75% of Vietnamese and 52% of Chinese have had explanation about microbiota, vs 39% overall). They also distinguish themselves with a an above-average adoption of beneficial-gut microbiota behaviors: 84% of Vietnamese and 82% of Chinese currently don't smoke (vs 77% overall), 82% of Vietnamese and 63% of Chinese consume prebiotics at least monthly (vs 38% overall), and 70% of Vietnamese and 69% of Chinese consume probiotics at least monthly (vs 42% overall).

- **In Latin America, despite higher education on microbiota, harmful behaviors are widely adopted**: 72% of Mexicans and 58% of Brazilians have received at least one piece of information from a healthcare professional about microbiota (vs 50% on average). However, their dietary habits need to change, as they have widely adopted gut-microbiota-damaging behaviors: 49% of Brazilians and 38% of Mexicans consume fermented foods monthly or less often (vs 33% on average), 32% of Brazilians and of Mexicans consume ultra processed food several times a week or more often (vs 24% on average).
- **In the US, a lack of microbiota information from healthcare providers, associated with a low adoption of protective behaviors**: 44% of Americans have had at least one piece of information about microbiota (vs 50% on average). Only 32% of Americans eat multiple fruits and vegetables daily (vs 40% on average), while 32% consume ultra processed food weekly or even daily (vs 24% on average).
- **In Europe, despite low levels of information from healthcare professionals, respondents seem to have adopted more beneficial behaviors**: among all Europeans countries surveyed, respondents are less likely than average to have received at least one piece of professional information about microbiota (49% in Italy, 47% in Portugal, 40% in Poland, 37% in France, 30% in Germany, and 27% in Finland, vs 50% overall). However, Europeans are more likely than average to have include protective gut microbiota behaviors in their daily life: 85% of Germans avoid eating red meat more than weekly (vs 63% on average), 57% of Portuguese are eating multiple fruits and vegetables on a daily basis (vs 40% on average), 56% of Poles and 52% of Finns are consuming fermented foods at least multiple times a week (vs 44% on average), and 43% of French and 41% of Italians are consuming ultra processed food less frequently than monthly (vs 34% on average).

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Construction of the Gut Microbiota Index in 2026:

The creation of the **Gut Microbiota Index** involves a systematic approach, emphasizing self-reported behaviors related to gut health preservation. This is neither a diagnosis nor a clinical evaluation of the gut microbiota and in no way replaces a medical consultation. Here's how the index is constructed:

Objective: To categorize participants into three groups based on their behavior toward gut health preservation – those with "low", "medium", and "good" behaviors.

Items and Scale: The index utilizes 9 items, each assessed through a frequency scale ranging from "daily" to "never". This provides a nuanced understanding of each participant's behavioral tendencies.

- Current smoking status
- Eat multiple fruits and vegetables
- Consume ultra processed food (ultra-processed foods are heavily industrially processed items that contain ingredients not typically found in home cooking)
- Consume fermented foods such as yogurt, kefir, sourdough bread, sauerkraut, kimchi, and kombucha
- Eat red meat
- Drink alcohol
- Engage in physical activity
- Consume probiotics
- Consume prebiotics

Behavior Classification: For each behavior, expert consensus determined thresholds that categorize the actions into "low", "medium", or "good". If a participant's behavior is deemed 'poor', they receive 0 point for that item; "medium" behaviors receive 1 point, and "good" behaviors earn 2 points.

Weighting Variable: Recognizing that some behaviors might be more crucial for gut microbiota health, a hierarchical weighting system is applied. Each behavior is assigned a different weighting coefficient to reflect its relative importance.

Scoring System: The final gut microbiota score is computed by summing the points from all behaviors, adjusted by their respective weighting coefficients. A higher score indicates adherence to more beneficial behaviors for gut microbiota preservation. A score from 0 to 50 indicates a "low" adoption of gut microbiota beneficial behaviors, 51 to 75 a "medium" adoption of gut microbiota beneficial behaviors, and 76 to 100 a "good" adoption of gut microbiota beneficial behaviors.

- *It's important to note that this index is an initial attempt and open to improvements. Future iterations could benefit from feedback and empirical testing to enhance its accuracy and reliability.*

About the Biocodex Microbiota Institute

As a pioneer in microbiota research, Biocodex launched, in 2017, the Biocodex Microbiota Institute which is committed to better health by raising awareness of the key role played by human microbiota. Through educational, evidence-based, and accessible content, it informs the general public and supports healthcare professionals in integrating microbiota more fully into medical practice.

www.biocodexmicrobiotainstitute.com/en

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