

AKAMAI— Personal Care, Radically Simplified

Our Microbiomes: Make Love Not War

There is an ecosystem of trillions of bacteria, tiny spiders, and fungi living on every human—from our toes to the tops of our heads. That’s billions *per square centimeter*. While our automatic response may be to grab the nearest bottle of sanitizer or jump in the shower to soap up, we actually need these communities of teeming microorganisms, known as microbiomes.

Yes, keep washing your hands after handling raw meats or during flu season. It’s important to keep bad bacteria in check. But we want a balanced biome that’s not over-sanitized, where the good bacteria our bodies benefit from can flourish.

Bacteria are essential to our well-being. Beneficial bacteria, like *Staphylococcus epidermis*, boost our immune cells’ ability to fight off the pathogens that cause a wide range of infections and diseases. *Acinetobacter* bacteria is another ally, found to help protect against allergic reactions. Several other bacteria affect the production of inflammatory and anti-inflammatory molecules; if they aren’t in balance, the inflammatory response can run rampant, triggering autoimmune diseases like arthritis and psoriasis. The takeaway message is—don’t make war on bacteria because many of them are our friends.

These guiding principles will help maintain and support a vibrant skin microbiome:

1. When it comes to cleaning ourselves, “less is more”.

Our bodies have evolved to take care of themselves over millennia. Excessive cleaning rituals can undermine them. All we really need to do is wash with water, use a mild soap on the armpits, groin and feet; and cleanse the hair about once a week. Soap physically binds to microbes and sloughs them off, including beneficial bacteria.

By using soap and shampoo minimally, we avoid stripping away the body’s natural oil, known as sebum. Made by the sebaceous glands, sebum helps create a healthy level of moisture on skin and scalp, which favors beneficial bacteria while also delivering the powerful antioxidant vitamin E for youthful hair and skin.

Our bodies are home to a variety of different microbiomes that are meant to coexist with us. We have specialized microbes living in our armpits, for example.

By using antiperspirants, we block the detoxifying effects of sweating and disrupt the environment that fosters friendly bacteria. Natural deodorants are a better choice because they don't inhibit perspiration.

Our mouths also have their own micro-kingdom of beneficial bacteria. Watch out for toothpastes containing Triclosan or other antibacterial ingredients. These throw off the oral microbiome's balance, ultimately contributing to bad breath and unhealthy gums. Plus the mouth's lining is a mucous membrane that absorbs substances a thousand times more readily than skin, potentially carrying ingredients into the bloodstream and the internal microbiome.

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- 2. Dirt is good.** Studies show that people living with pets and who garden or otherwise have regular contact with soil, tend to have more diverse microbial communities, better allergy resistance and stronger immune systems than people who don't.

Soil bacteria organisms (SBOs) we need include bacillus subtilis, known to be key in building healthy gut flora. Along with other SBOs, they also help with digestion and nutrient absorption. Mycobacterium vaccae is another SBO heavy hitter, found to trigger the release of serotonin, the feel-good neurotransmitter that elevates mood and decreases anxiety.

Clay, a common soil material, has the positive affect of binding to bad bacteria thereby enabling good bacteria to better do their jobs. Historically, many ancient cultures ate clay for its cleansing properties. It is especially helpful for oral care and can be found today in some natural toothpastes (including Akamai).

- 3. Choose good ingredients.** Read labels and stick with formulas that work with your body, not against it, when choosing soap, shampoo or toothpaste. Deodorant soaps are among the harshest personal care products, typically adding triclosan or other antibacterial agents to the mix of toxic ingredients found in most mainstream brands. These are endocrine disruptors and weaken the immune system.

Go for ingredients like coconut, olive, jojoba or almond oil and clays; avoid anything with "fragrance" listed as an ingredient. This can be a Trojan horse for a wide range of toxic chemicals such as phthalates, known hormone disruptors.

Essential oils are a safe alternative for nice smelling personal care products. Steer clear of preservatives too, which can include BHT or BHA, and also look out for artificial colors, many of which are linked to cancer or other diseases.

Products like Akamai will actually “feed the jungle” of your microbiomes instead of dousing it with harsh or harmful ingredients. Check out our [blog on toxics](#) to dig deeper.