



PROEUHEALTH

The unknown within us – ageing affects our gut flora

Ageing does not only affect the way we look from outside; the microbiota living in our gut also changes with age. The intestinal microbiota of infants is quite well identified, but only small part of the microbes in elderly people can be characterised at the moment.

Researchers in an EU-funded project, CROWNALIFE, explored how the gut microbiota changes from adults to elderly. The findings suggest that the adults have a large number of different groups of bacteria living in their gut. With ageing the diversity of bacteria is going up, but at the same time there are an increasing number of bacteria that are not accounted for by the existing techniques. With elderly people, only 8 % of the microbes occupying the gut could be recognised when most typical groups of bacteria were analysed. Some of the microbes found belonged to new groups that have not been previously detected from the human gut. By comparison, in infants, 70% of the microbes in the gut can be identified, and the number of species is ten times lower. As variation among individuals is wide, it appears that each of us has a unique gut microbiota.

Within the project CROWNALIFE, researchers in Belgium, France, Italy, Germany, United Kingdom and Sweden have also studied the possible geographic differences in the kinds of microbes living in our gastro-intestinal tract. Furthermore, it has been studied whether there is a possibility to influence the composition and functions of microbes with food products tailored for that purpose.

The research on the composition of our microbiota opens new doors for understanding how our own microbes can influence our well being. The results will help to define strategies and recommendations to promote and maintain a balanced, beneficial microbiota.

More information on the project can be obtained from the project web page

www.crownalife.be or from the coordinator Dr. Joel Dore

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