

The Microbe Trigger

Microbes are the fourth STAMP trigger that can activate the immune system's response. Such organisms include bacteria, fungi, and viruses. Microbes exist any place the body comes into contact with the world—the skin, the mouth, the GI tract. An adult human body contains trillions of microbial DNA—so many, in fact, that they outnumber human DNA ten to one.

The process starts when we're born. In the womb, babies live in a mostly sterile, microbe-free environment. Most newborns become seeded by the mother's bacterial flora during birth. Many of these bacteria serve as fortification and communication to the intestinal walls. From then on, that individual's microbiome is influenced by all sorts of experiences. From the air we breathe, to what we touch, to the food and drink we ingest, and to how we react to our stress, each of us cultivates a unique microbial forest where the balance of powers of good versus bad can be altered even within hours. Typically, these are mostly friendly bacteria that live and thrive on our skin and in our GI tract. The more microbial variety, the better. The more you are exposed to a wide variety of microbes, the less likely you will develop allergies and autoimmunity. Most of these protect us from harmful bacteria and aid in communication to our walls and the inner immune military powers lurking behind them.

As I've said before, nothing made or meant to be in the body is inherently good or bad. When it comes to the microbiome, balance and diversity are key.

VACCINE BACKLASH

As mentioned earlier, the top three reasons for death in the US in 1900 were all due to infections, or microbial bugs. That's when anti-biotics and vaccines dramatically altered the medical landscape. Microbes are no longer the threat they once were. However, in the 1980s, society was awakened to the threat of infection by a newly advanced viral microbe called HIV. The fear HIV spawned was justified because the virus's mechanism of attack focused on both areas that lead to disease: it breached the walls and took out the main portions of one's military, and with relative ease. Persons infected with HIV were then vulnerable to even the common cold. This new and advanced microbe scared the daylights out of us all. As with any advanced threat, it also taught a lot about how to better defend ourselves. When I started my medical training, there were specialists who only dealt with HIV since the complications of this microbe had such devastating potential. Today, a single medication keeps most infected patients requiring little further interventions. I applaud the many minds that helped squash HIV in less than one generation.

Now we're in a new era that tends to demonize antibiotics and vaccines. I want to make sure we appreciate the power of these tools. Vaccines and antibiotics give our military an upper hand to win the battle or, more importantly, the war. Can they both result in friendly fire? Absolutely. The key here is balance, especially if there is a surplus of exposure to antibiotics—or what I call the A-bomb. (I want to remind you that 70 percent of the antibiotics purchased are by the food industry, which we indirectly ingest unknowingly.) So, how do you determine if you are healthy in terms of microbes? It's time to think like the consultant to a company.

1. Morale: How do you feel? (What are the division managers and employees saying?)

Often when we think of microbes, we think of symptoms like fevers, chills, overwhelming fatigue or GI symptoms like nausea, diarrhea, or vomiting. However, this is a mistake and naive. Microbes can be stealthy, like toxins and allergens. Their initial symptoms may indicate an infectious microbe trigger, but after the initial surge, they may go silent, maintaining an ongoing presence that can be chronic and debilitating.

Let's say you're experiencing symptoms. You presume you have a typical bacterial infection, but in fact you have a different bug like Lyme, mononucleosis, yeast, mold, or a parasite. You go to your healthcare provider and beg for an antibiotic. After a few days, your symptoms fade, which, by the way, had nothing to do with the antibiotic. Since Lyme, mononucleosis, yeast, mold, and parasites do not respond to the typical antibiotics, taking that antibiotic wasn't just ineffective, it was counterproductive. You just crippled your immune system by killing healthy bacteria.

► *A-Bomb*

Each time you take an antibiotic, it's comparable to dropping an

A-bomb onto this vast, dense forest and wiping out the supporters to your intestinal walls. (Again, that's why in Europe physicians are required to prescribe a probiotic whenever they prescribe an antibiotic.)

When an A-bomb wipes out the GI microbial forest intended to support your intestinal walls, the resultant forest regrowth becomes a potential breeding ground for more bad bacteria to rise up, as well as yeast and other microbes, which are not supporters of your intestinal walls. They actually erode wall integrity.

► *Imbalance*

An imbalance of our good versus bad bacteria is the most over-

looked microbe trigger today. Interestingly, all the other STAMP triggers can impact your microbiome balance. For example, toxins in the form of many medications, like proton pump inhibitors for reflux, can radically impair the microbial balance that is acting as support for your GI wall. Sadly, these medications are handed out like candy on Halloween. There are literally aisles in pharmacies dedicated to reducing stomach acid.

Because microbes can either impact your microbiome balance or be silent, stealth triggers, the symptoms can be subtle. I often prescribe stomach acid (yes, you read that correctly) for people who present with bloating, reflux, or gas since such symptoms often suggest an inadequate amount of stomach acid to provide the necessary weeding of our microbiome balance to be shifted toward the most beneficial bacteria. There are obviously indications this would not be a good idea, but it is often more effective to follow the natural design of our stomach, which is designed to have a pH of 1.7. Yet, acid-reducing medications have been shown to raise the pH of the stomach to 8.0. This is not the environment the stomach was designed to work best in.

► *Forestry: Weed, Seed, and Fertilize*

The key to rebuilding a healthy, flourishing microbiome forest

that supports our intestinal walls is to not only remove the microbe but to also do some weeding, fertilizing, and reseeded. In order to build back up a healthy, balanced microbiome forest, we can weed with stomach and pancreatic enzyme supplement support. We can fertilize with prebiotics, like fiber, and we can reseed with probiotics. Fermented foods are an excellent source of probiotics.

Providing your walls with extra armory is also important during these times of weakened walls. There is a plethora of supplements available. However, I am a big fan of the peptide BPC 157 that aids in healing the integrity of the GI wall.²¹ It has been a game changer for my patients. For more information on BPC 157, you can check out integrative peptides online.

So, if someone comes to see me with a known exposure to Lyme, mononucleosis, or, say, mold that occurred many months earlier, they may still be reporting a wide array of symptoms, including fatigue, aches and pains, getting ill more easily, or even neurological symptoms despite there not being an obvious acute sign of a microbial infection. Once again, like all the triggers, the list of potential symptoms can be quite broad and not exactly insightful to isolating the trigger. This is the reason to always return to the five STAMP triggers as the basic starting point for any and all symptoms, starting particularly with the two bookends: stress and poor diet.

Books and books have been written on Lyme disease. What I've learned in all my research is that it isn't about the microbe itself but what it does to our defenses and immune system that leads to persistent symptoms and vulnerability. The specialty centers sprinkled around the US that are most effective in managing Lyme patients, for example, go back to the basics and eliminate as many of the STAMP triggers impacting that person's body. If enough of your triggers are eliminated in time, your own military might replenish enough to win the war.

As any general knows, we can't get too upset about the battles. We need a good overall strategy to win the war. This is how you manage microbes in a world of stealth microbes that distort our microbiome balance, erode our walls, and threaten our military, resulting in ongoing friendly fire that looks a lot like autoimmunity.

2. Structure: Body Composition (What does the company physically look like?)

People who are chronically ill today are not just the people who are laden with cancer or bedridden in the ICU. Chronically ill people are walking among us every single day, and it may be entirely due to an ongoing exposure of a stealth microbe. The CDC reports that six out of every ten Americans have at least one chronic disease.²²

When the body is under constant attack, it cannot build muscle. Remember, muscle is the exact opposite of illness, and if you are doing all the basics right and yet you can't build muscle, then you need to revisit your five STAMP triggers. Just don't forget about silent microbes.

Finally, something I cannot stress enough is that until you heal the two STAMP bookends, stress and poor diet, you literally heal nothing. And I would include the microbe trigger here since stress and poor diet set the stage for microbial imbalance to occur, period.

3. Reviews: Biomarkers (What do the customer reviews say?)

When we're looking for elusive triggers that fall under microbes, the theme is not as easily assessed

with the basic biomarker panel drawn by most physicians. In my practice, I've found that the most important initial survey biomarkers indicating a microbe trigger are:

1. IgA levels: Elevated levels suggest your GI walls are under constant attack. This is likely due to a persistent trigger from your diet that may impact the good versus bad microbes protecting your GI walls. (Note the crossover with allergens.)

2. Eosinophils: Elevations suggest a possible parasitic exposure or an allergen that might be impacting your microbiome balance.
3. Low white blood cell count: Suggests a chronic illness, which could be a silent microbe if all the other triggers have been eliminated or addressed.
4. Calprotectin levels: This can differentiate between an infectious versus a non-infectious GI cause.

To determine if you have a microbe trigger, first address the basics for the other triggers (stress, toxins, allergens, poor diet). If you don't see a positive change, consider a comprehensive stool study to better understand the microbiome balance in your GI tract—the good and the not so good.

Some functional physicians do comprehensive stool studies on every patient and that is their starting point. This is not a bad idea, but I try to be cognizant of those extra costs and have learned over time that once you heal the other triggers, oftentimes microbiome balance can heal itself with the simple techniques we talked about earlier: weeding, seeding, fertilizing, and supporting GI wall healing through the peptide BPC 157.

► *Irritable Bowel Syndrome (IBS)*

One of the most commonly diagnosed conditions in the US

today is irritable bowel syndrome, or IBS. There are people who have entire workups of their GI tract and all tests reveal essentially everything is okay, even though the patient is reporting diarrhea, constipation, or both. It can be a very frustrating process.

A quick way to determine if you are dealing with an inflammatory breach of your GI tract wall is to check a biomarker called calprotectin. This test quickly differentiates your symptoms from a more serious etiology that may be causing your symptoms, like an inflammatory condition such as Crohn's disease or perhaps an infection. If the calprotectin is elevated, it suggests an inflammatory condition which may or may not be infectious. This will help isolate the starting point on which to potentially focus your attention. Plus, it can oftentimes reduce a lot of time, angst, and more invasive testing.

Most physicians have never even heard of or ordered comprehensive stool studies or calprotectin. I am not talking about stool studies that simply determine if you have a bacteria or parasite. Instead, these are stool studies that take a comprehensive snapshot of your microbial diversity, enzymes, and potential weaknesses in the walls. I believe it should be part of our normal basic starting point when this trigger is of concern. After all, we are no longer living in the twentieth century. (Companies that address insights more comprehensively with microbes include Genova and Great Plains Laboratory.)

SUMMARY

Dangerous microbe triggers are now uncommon in the US. Today, microbes exist in a more silent and elusive manner. Fortunately for those living in the US, this concern can be lower on the list of starting points, except for those living in endemic areas for, say, Lyme or mold.

If you have elevated IgA levels, bloating, or allergy symptoms, this may be an expression of you bringing in a persistent trigger that is considered inflammatory to your body and ramming the walls of your defenses. In the case of the GI tract, it will certainly lead to an imbalance of the good bacteria in your microbiome. In this case, it's important to determine the likely allergen then eliminate, weed, seed, and fertilize. Remember, our triggers cross-pollinate.

In order to build back a healthy, balanced microbiome forest, weed with enzymes, fertilize with prebiotics like fiber, and reseed with probiotics like fermented foods. Plus, you can strengthen your GI walls temporarily with many other supplements, but I prefer the peptide BPC 157 as nearly an all-inclusive support over such other more complicated protocols. I have been amazed by BPC 157's effectiveness and how often I get people off reflux medications with this peptide in conjunction with dietary changes and oftentimes the addition of stomach acids.

The biggest mistake in dealing with the chronic aftermath of persistent symptoms with microbes is trying to eradicate that microbe directly and that's it. Today's current treatments for certain microbes are still inadequate or ineffective at complete eradication, like for Lyme disease or mononucleosis. Therefore, the priority is treating it like any other disease, by doing everything you can to improve your walls/defense systems and augment your military to reduce excess friendly fire. We do this by addressing all five of your STAMP triggers and start with the basics for each trigger, especially the two bookends—stress and poor diet.