Hui-Chu Pung

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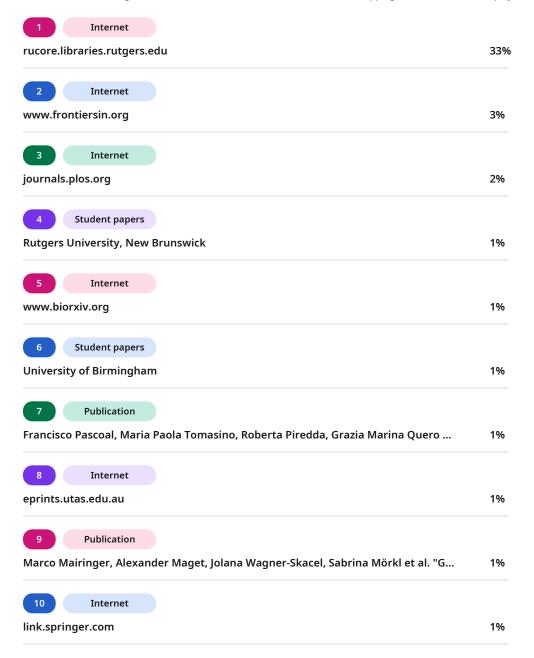
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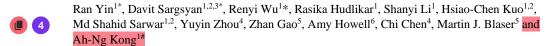




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Microbiome and metabolome alterations in Nrf2 knockout mice with induced gut inflammation and fed with phenethyl isothiocyanate and cranberry enriched diets



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Abbreviations

ARE - antioxidant response element

CDCA - chenodeoxycholic acid

DCA - dichloroacetic acid

DSS - dextran sulfate sodium

GCDCA - glycochenodeoxycholic Acid

GDCA - glycodeoxycholic acid

LCA - lithocholic acid

MCA - muricholic acid

NRF2- NF-E2-related factor 2

OTU – operational taxonomic unit

PCA – principal components analysis

PEITC - phenethyl isothiocyanate

qPCR - quantitative polymerase chain reaction

Keywords: microbiome, Nrf2, PEITC, cranberry, DSS

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gut

Abstract

Scope

Cranberries are enriched with antioxidants and can help prevent bacterial infections, while ethyl isothiocyanate (PEITC) found in corporating these into diet may have anti-matery propertential health benefits for human gut. Interactions of microbiome and metabolites with the host's cells play crucial roles in maintaining gastrointestinal (GI) tract balance.

Methods and results



acid (IDIIA) and thit hocholic acid (LCA) that are produced by

Conclusions

Compared to WT, Nrf2 KO mice microbiomes exhibited higher richness and diversity. The results also suggest that PEITC and cranberry-enriched diets positively affected the hosts' microbiomes and increased the production of microbial metabolites. Additionally, the dietary supplements showed the reversal of the negative

bacteria, and muricholic acid (MCA) that it is a primary bile acid

produced by mice including germ-free mice.

nduced inflammation

two major phylum in the hosts' intestines. Taken together, sindicates 12 the phenomic impacted microbiota metabolic reprogramming induced by DSS-mediated inflammation and dietary supplements of cranberry and PEITC.

Scope

Cranberries are enriched with phytochemicals with potent antioxidant properties, while phenethyl isothiocyanate (PEITC) found abundantly in crucifers, possesses anti-cancer and anti-inflammatory properties. Incorporation of these into diet could have potential health benefits for human gut. Interactions of microbiome and metabolites with the host's cells play crucial roles in maintaining gastrointestinal (GI) tract balance.

Methods and results

The aim of this study was to focus on the alteration of gut microbiomes and metabolomes by cranberry and PEITC enriched diets in wild-type (WT) and Nrf2 knockout (KO) mice, and the diets' potential in reducing the risk of inflammation. Nrf2 KO mice had higher alpha diversity compared to WT. Cranberry and PEITC limited the inflammatory effect of dextran sulfate

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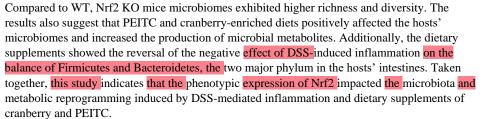






sodium (DSS) and increased the diversity of mouse gut microbiota. DSS challenge altered the production of several metabolites while PEITC and cranberry feeding reversed some of the changes. The enriched diets modulated the metabolic responses to induced inflammation likely via microbial composition alterations. Nrf2 KO mice had lower levels of short-chain fatty acids (SCFA) and amino acids such as phenylalanine, glutamate and proline, and higher levels of secondary bile acids such as dichloroacetic acid (DCA) and lithocholic acid (LCA) that are produced by gut bacteria, and muricholic acid (MCA) that it is a primary bile acid produced by mice including germ-free mice.

Conclusions



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1. Introduction

Microbial communities leaving on and in the surfaces of human and animal bodies can drastiacally affect the host's health. These include archea, bacteria and fungi that are abundant that inhabit skin and the inner lining of the gastrointestinal tract (GI). (1). They help to metabolize essential nutrients, provide energy and interact with the host's immune system. (2, 3, 4). For example, gut bacteria Butyricicoccus Pullicaecorum and Butyricicoccus Pullicaecorum produce butyrate, an important metabolite for human GI homeostasis and diseases prevention (5). Lactobacillus strains potentially involved in essential vitamins metabolism (6) and improvement of human sleep quality (7). Another group of bacterial strains, bifidobacterium have been suggested to influence higher cognitive functions in humans and to be associated with depression, pain and brain activity during stress. (8, 9, 10, 11, 12). Numerous studies have been conducted to explore gut microbiota composition responding to specific conditions such as high fat or high fiber diet, or inflammatory bowel diseases (17,13, 14, 15, 16, 18, 19, 20, 21). In addition, research suggest that host's genotype may influence the human gut microbiota, especially in infancy (22, 23). The combination of host genotype, gut microbiota and postnatal factors such as antibiotic usage, dietary pattern and environmental microbes shows significant influence on human gut development and homeostasis (24, 25). Hence, the underlying mechanism of such microbiota-host crosstalk is crucial but remains poorly understood.

Cranberry have been consumed historically by Native Americans as food and medicine (26). Today, cranberry is widely consumed as fresh and dried fruit, juice and sauce. The berries are known for their high content of proanthocyanidins, flavonoids and other organic acids (27, 28). Cranberry consumption have been associated with reduced risk of urinary tract infections (29, 30) and inflammation (31), and improved cardiovascular health (32).

Phenethyl isothiocyanate (PEITC) belongs to the isothiocyanate family of compounds which are formed when glucosinolates, a class of sulfur-containing compounds found in cruciferous vegetables, are hydrolyzed by myrosinase (33, 34). PEITC has been shown to have a wide range of biological activities including anticancer, antioxidant, and anti-inflammatory effects (35, 36).

The composition of the GI microbial communities determines the efficiency of processing food into metabolites including amino acids, bile acids and SCFA. The current study utilized

C57BL/6J wild type (WT) and Nrf2 knockout (KO) mice to test diets incorporated with either cranberry or PEITC. Both food additives have been shown to enhance the production of some of the metabolites production. The health benefits of these phytochemicals include activation of Nrf2 signaling pathway and cancer prevention. The former is a master regulator of oxidative stress and inflammation. The aim of this study was to better understand the mechanisms by

stress and inflammation. The aim of this study was to better understand the mechanisms by which cranberry and PEITC can influence the gut microbiome and microbial metabolite production, and further improve the gut health via reducing inflammation and achieving homeostasis.

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Materials and Methods

2.1 Animals and Study Design

- C57BL/6J (WT) mice were purchased from Jackson Laboratory (Bar Harbor, ME). Our lab has maintained C57BL/6J Nrf2 KO mice since 2005 (37, 38). Mice were kept in a controlled temperature (20-22°C) and humidity (45–55%) environment under 12-hour light/dark cycles at the Rutgers Animal Facility. Food and water were provided *ad libitum*. The study consisted of three experiments (shown in Figure 1).
- All animals were fed with AIN93M standard grain diet (Research Diets, Inc. NJ) for the first 2 weeks of the experiments to equalize/normalize the microbiomes at the baseline. After the equalization period, the mice were randomized to treatment groups.
- equalization period, the mice were randomized to treatment groups.

 In the first experiment (Exp01), 18 Nrf2 KO mice were assigned to 2 groups with one group
- diet. Further 10 WT mice were randomized into either the control diet or the PEITC-diet in the second experiment (Exp02). Finally, dextran sulfate sodium (DSS) was introduced to 20 mice to
- induce gut inflammation, and cranberry-enriched diet was added (10% of feed by weight), in the third experiment (Exp03). WT and Nrf2 KO mice were randomized into one of four treatment
 - groups (Naïve, DSS, DSS+PEITC, and DSS+Cranberry) (Figure 1). 2.5% DSS was dissolved in autoclaved water and made fresh weekly. Fecal samples were collected fresh, snap frozen in
 - liquid nitrogen and stored at -80°C until further analysis for 16S ribosomal RNA (rRNA) sequencing and microbial metabolites. Fecal samples for 16S sequencing were collected at weeks 1 and 5 in Exp01, weeks 0 and 4 in Exp02, and weeks 0, 1 and 8 in Exp03. Additional

continuing to receive the control diet while 0.05% of PEITC was added to the second group's

- samples were collected from all the mice for metabolomic analysis at weeks 2 and 6 in Exp03. Since the fecal sample collection timing varied slightly between experiments, it was realigned and labeled as baseline (end of the equalization period, i.e., Week 0), early (weeks 1 through 2) or late (weeks 4 through 8) timepoints.
- All animal experiments were conducted under the animal protocol approved by the Institutional Animal Care and Use Committee (IACUC) of Rutgers University.
 - 2.2 16S ribosomal RNA gene sequencing and analysis
 - PowerSoil DNA Isolation Kit (QIAGEN) was used to extract bacterial DNA from the samples.

 PCR amplification of the 16S rRNA genes were carried out using PCR primers specific for the V4 region (Supplemental Table 1) (39, 40, 41, 42, 43, 44, 45). Indexed amplicons were pooled and sequenced on MiSeq (Illumina) yielding at least 8,000 300 base-pair (bp) pair-ended reads. Microbial operational taxonomic units (OTUs) and their taxonomic assignments were analyzed using Quantitative Insights Into Microbial Ecology (QIIME2) bioinformatic pipeline (46, 47) and

Divisive Amplicon Denoising Algorithm 2 (DADA2 version 1.16) R package (48).

QIIME2 mapped reference at 97% similarity against representative sequences of 97% OTU in SILVA, a high quality rRNA database (49), followed by chimeric sequences removal from subsequent analyses (50). Visualization of the microbiome similarities was performed using the results of principle coordinates analysis (PCoA) on the unweighted unique fraction metric (UniFrac).

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- DADA2 pipeline was used to process FastQ sequence data files containing pair-ended reads with average length of 300 bp into a high-resolution OTU table (i.e., amplicon sequencing variants). The reads were sorted, and the quality scores were examined. This result in the truncation of forward reads to 280 bp and reverse reads to 220 bp based on the quality score profiles. The reads were then merged and aggregated. Chimeric OTUs were identified and removed. Taxonomy was assigned to the OTUs by exact matching (100% identity) to the SILVA reference database.
- The OTUs mapped to the *Eukaryota* and *Archaea* Kingdoms, and the OTUs that could not be mapped to a Kingdom, were removed. Additionally, bacterial OTUs belonging to phylum *Cyanobacteria* were removed as contamination from diet. Finally, OTUs that were not mapped to any bacterial phylum were removed, and the remaining OTUs analyzed.

2.3 Microbial metabolites analysis

Microbial metabolites that included bile acids, free amino acids, and SCFA were quantified in fecal samples collected at weeks 2 and 6. Liquid chromatography mass spectrometry (LC-MS)-based targeted analysis was performed to estimate the metabolite concentrations in the samples (51).

2.4 Statistical Analyses

- Shannon diversity index was used to assess the alpha diversity in the samples at OTU level. This index can range from zero, which corresponds to having a single class (i.e., a single OTU) in the sample, to ln(k) with k equally distributed OTUs. The larger the values of the index, therefore,
 - represent microbial communities with greater number of and more equally distributed classes of OTUs. The estimates were presented as means +/- standard error of the means (SEM).
- Multivariable analysis of variance (ANOVA) was used to estimate the effects of genotype, diet and aging, followed by multiple comparison with false discovery rate (FDR) adjustment for the p-values
 - Principal components analysis (PCA) was utilized to investigate the bacterial composition of the samples at different taxonomic levels. PCA is a linear transformation that projects the data from the original *n*-dimensional, correlated space (here, each taxonomic unit was viewed as a dimension) onto a new, orthogonal *n*-dimensional space such that the first principal component (PC1) will be in the direction that explains most of variability in the data, while the second (PC2) the second most and orthogonal to PC1, and so on. The results of the PCA analysis were visualized with biplots by plotting the data against the first two principal components and color-coding the points for genotype, diet or DSS challenge. Simultaneously, the biplots displayed the direction and the magnitude of the original axes (i.e., individual taxonomic units). To assess the predictive power of PCA, multinomial regression on group labels (corresponding to taxonomic units) vs. principal components was performed.
- Heatmaps were used to visualize concentrations of metabolites in the samples. The group mean differences were estimated and tested using analysis of variance (ANOVA) for each metabolite individually and shown as boxplots with bars and stars indicating statistically significance between different groups.

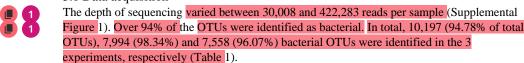
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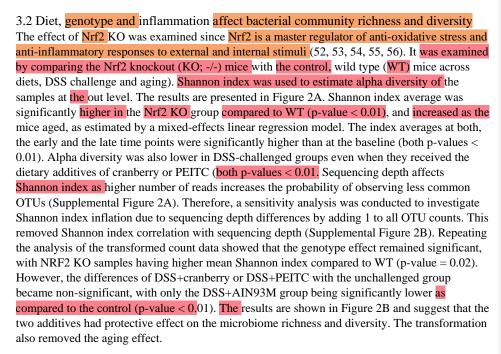




3 Results

3.1 Data acquisition





3.3 Principal components analysis shows association of microbiome composition with diet and genotype

Next, OTU counts were aggregated at the *Phylum* level. In total, 22 phyla were identified, and the top 10 of which accounted for >99.96% of all the hits. Since deeper sequencing could increase the chances of identifying rare organisms (Supplemental Figure 3), and the samples varied quite greatly by sequencing depth (Supplemental Figure 1), rare phylum were excluded from downstream analysis. Data from the 3 experiments was combined for the analysis, however, each group of samples was visualized separately to highlight the differences between experimental conditions (Figure 4). The PCA suggested relatively high inter-experiment variability, specifically, the relative lower abundance of *Bacteroidetes*, and the relative higher abundance of *Verrucomicrobia* in Exp03 as compared to Exp01 and Exp02. Relative abundances of *Firmicutes* and *Actinobacteria* were higher in the WT DSS-treated mice in Exp03 as

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- compared to all the other groups, while Epsilonbacteraeota were more abundant in all Nrf2-KO and WT control (AIN93M) groups as compared to the rest. DSS+PEITC samples grouped between the negative (no-DSS+ AIN93M) and the positive (DSS+ AIN93M) controls,
- suggesting the potential protective effect of PEITC on microbiome of DSS-treated mice.
 - The top 10 most abundant Phylum were used for further PCA. The analysis showed the strong effect of diet on the microbial composition. Specifically, relative abundance of Firmicutes and Verrucomicrobia increased, while relative abundance of Proteobacteria, Deferribacteres and Epsilonbacteraeota decreased, in all the WT DSS-treated groups as compared to the control diet groups (AIN93M). Exp03 data was reanalyzed separately to remove the potential of study effect in examining the effect of Nrf2-KO (Figure 5).
 - In total, 31 classes of bacteria were identified across the three experiments. The top classes 17 accounted for more than 99.99% of the total hits. PCA showed strong negative correlation of Nrf2-KO with Bacilli class (phylum (p.) Firmicutes) that was consistent in all 3 experiments (Figure 6). Separately, Exp03 data was reanalyzed, with 18 classes being identified in the samples out of which 16 classes contained almost all of the hits and were used in the analysis. Figure 7 biplot showed clear separation by genotype. The relative abundance of *Clostridia* (p. *Firmicutes*) was higher while Betaproteobacteria, Deltaproteobacteria (p. Proteobacteria), and Epsilonproteobacteria, as well as Brachyspirae (p. Spirochaetes), Campylobacteria (p. Epsilonbacteraeota), and Deferribacteres (p. Deferribacteres) were lower in all three DSStreated groups. Gammaproteobacteria (p. Proteobacteria) and Verrucomicrobiae (p. Verrucomicrobia) had higher relative abundance in the DSS+AIN93M and DSS+Cranberry groups.

3.4 Firmicutes/Bacteroidetes ratio

Biological activities such as aging, change of body mass index, and maintaining intestinal homeostasis have been linked to Firmicutes to Bacteroidetes ratio (F/B) (57, 58). Increased F/B ratio has been associated with obesity while the decreased ratio has correlated positively with inflammatory bowel disease (IBD) (59). Therefore, the F/B ratio was used as an endpoint in this study to examine differences in microbiome composition across genotypes, diets and timepoints (Figures 8). The abundance of *Firmicutes* was lower or equal to the abundance of *Bacteroidetes* in Exp01 and Exp02 samples but the F/B ratios in the WT mice samples were higher than in the Nrf2-KO samples in all 3 experiments. Mixed-effects linear regression models was next used to estimate these differences in Exp03. First, a mixed-effects model with no interaction terms was fitted to the F/B ratios. The F/B ratio averages were significantly lower in DSS+PEITC and DSS+Cranberry groups compared to the AIN93M-no DSS treated control group (log2[F/B] = -0.51 and -0.46, and p-values < 0.01 and = 0.01, respectively). The average ratio was also lower in the Nrf2-KO group as compared to WT ($\log 2[F/B] = -1.02$, p-value <0.01). The control group's average F/B ratio difference with the DSS control (DSS+AIN93M) as well as the differences between early or late timepoints vs. baseline were not statistically significant. Next, a genotypediet interaction term was added to the model. It confirmed the significant association of F/B ratios with the genotype $(\log 2[F/B] = -1.40, p$ -value < 0.01), and the Cranberry or PEITC diets

 $(\log 2[F/B] = -0.60 \text{ and } -0.71, \text{ respectively, with both } p\text{-values} < 0.01).$ Furthermore, the F/B ratio

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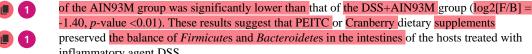


Tenericutes Anaeroplasma increased over time.

compared to WT (Figure 10B).



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- inflammatory agent DSS. **1** 13
 - 3.4 Linear Discriminant Analysis of aging and dietary effects Linear discriminant analysis Effect Size (LEfSe) was conducted with QIIME2 to further examine the effects of diet and aging. The composition changes in the microbiomes over time were examined by comparing the control samples at baseline (shown in Figure 9A and B in red) with the early (Week 1, Figure 9A in green) and late (Week 4, Figure 9B in green) timepoints. Taxa with relative abundance (≥ 0.1%) present in at least one specimen were included. In addition, the cladograms, using lineages with Linear Discriminant Analysis (LDA) score ≥ 2.0, showing the phylogenetic distribution of the microbial lineages at different time points were displayed. The analysis showed that Bacteroidetes Parabacteroides, Bacteroidetes Prevotella, Bacteroidetes S24_7, and Bacteroidetes, the relative abundance decreased, while Bacteroidetes Bacteroidales, Firmicutes Clostridiales, Firmicutes Oscillospira, Proteobacteria Desulfovibrionaceae, and
 - Separately, the effect of PEITC addition to the diet was examined and presented in Figures 9C and D. The figures show the impact of PEITC diet by comparing the microbiota for control diet at baseline (Week 0, shown in red) and at the later timepoints (Weeks 1 or 4, shown in green). Relative abundance of Firmicutes Ruminococcus significantly increased and Bacteroidetes 524_7 significantly decreased at the later time points compared to baseline. Several bacterial taxa were shown to be correlated with diet. Specifically, Bacteroidetes Odoribacter, Tenericutes Mycoplasmataceae and Proteobacteria Desulfovibrionaceae were found in significantly higher abundance while Firmicutes Clostridiales, Firmicutes Ruminococcus and Acidobacteria Ellin 6075 abundances were significantly lower in the control diet group compared to the PEITC
 - 3.5 Cranberry and PEITC additives partially preserved metabolomic profiles in the DSStreated mice
- Fecal samples of the DSS, DSS+Cranberry and DSS+PEITC treated mice from Exp03 were collected at weeks 2 and 6 and analyzed for the concentrations of free amino acids, bile acids and SCFA.
- Principal components analysis was conducted showing that concentrations of all but one (taurine) amino acids were higher in the DSS+Cranberry diet group (Figure 10A). However, for bile acids genotype rather than diet played a bigger role, with higher concentrations of all bile acids, specifically, LCA, DCA, MCA, CDCA, GDCA and GCDCA detected in the Nrf KO
- First few principal components were used as explanatory variables in multinomial regression models to classify the samples by diet, DSS challenge and genotype. The model with the first 3 principal components accurately classified 29 out of 48 samples (60.4%) by diet and DSS challenge, with the predictive power increasing slightly with the addition of PCs (Table 2). To

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classify the samples by genotype, however, a multinomial model with just PC1 was sufficient to correctly predict the group in34 out of 48 samples (70.8%) suggesting stronger separation of the samples by genotype (Table 3).

Univariable analysis of metabolite concentrations showed that DSS challenge altered the production of several of them while PEITC and cranberry infused diets protected against the

changes (Figure 11A). Specifically, DSS challenge decreased the concentrations of amino acids

such as glutamate, phenylalanine, and proline, but the concentration in the PEITC and cranberry fed mouse samples prevented these decreases (Figure 11B-D). PEITC and cranberry cotreatments also reversed the DSS-induced increases of secondary bile acids, mainly deoxycholic acid (DCA), lithocholic acid (LCA), and muricholic acid (MCA) (Figure 11E-G). In contrast, the diet additives had little to no effect on SCFA compared to DSS-challenged mice on

regular diet (Figure 11H-J). These results suggest that PEITC and cranberry (rich in anthocyanins) are capable of modulating the metabolic responses to DSS treatment in the colorectal tract, potentially through their effects on the microbiome.

Lastly, the fecal metabolite concentrations from Nrf2 KO and WT mice samples were compared. Interestingly, the Nrf2 KO mice had lower concentrations of amino acids (shown by glutamate, phenylalanine, and proline) and SCFA, and higher concentrations of secondary bile acids (shown by DCA, LCA, and MCA) compared to the WT mice (Figure 12A-I). These trends mirrored the metabolic profile difference between the DSS-challenged and WT mice.

4 Discussion

The important role of diet and genotype on microbial composition leaving in the host's GI has been systematically reported in the literature.

For example, significant increase of relative abundance of *Firmicutes (Clostridiales, Lactobacillales, Turicibacterales)* and *Verrucomicrobia (Verrucomicrobiales)* has been shown to

co-occur with a rapid and consistent dietary response to low fat/high plant polysaccharide, and high fat/sugar diets in gene deficient mice. At the same time, Bacterioidetes (Bacteroidales) has

been shown to decrease significantly in high fat/hi sugar diets. Additionally, dietary shift from

low fat/high plant to high fat/high sugar diets significantly altered relative abundances of *Clostridiales* and *Bacterioidales* bacterial orders. Utilizing gnotobiotic mouse model with

transplantation of healthy human fecal sample, The low fat/high plant polysaccharide diet also decreased the relative abundance of *Firmicutes Erysipelotrichi*, *Firmicutes Bacilli*, and increased

the relative abundance of *Bacteroidetes Bacteroidetes* compared with high fat/high sugar Western diet in gnotobiotic mouse model transplanted with healthy human fecal sample. In a

four-week cross over trial, twenty-eight healthy subjects were given 60 g of whole grain barley, brown rice or equal mixture of two ingredients every daily (60). All three whole grain diets

significantly increased the gut bacterial diversity, as measured by Shannon's and Simpson's

indices They also showed increased relative abundance of phylum *Firmicutes*, while the abundance of *Bacterioidetes* decreased Genus *Bacerioides* was significantly decreased by whole

barley and brown rice mix diet but was not affected by either of the single ingredient diet. In addition, genera *Roseburia*, *Bifidobacterium*, *Dialister* and *Odoribacter* were significantly

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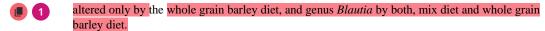
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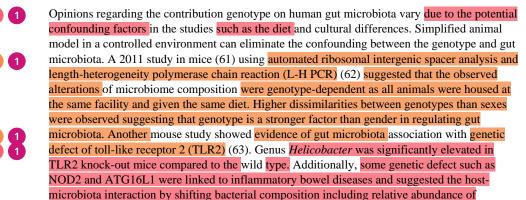


Actinobacteria, Firmicutes, and Proteobacteria.



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The role of gut microbiome has been a focal point of many studies over the past several decades, with its potential beneficial effects in metabolizing essential nutrients, providing energy and enhancing immune system (2, 3, 4). For example, *Butyricicoccus Pullicaecorum* and *Butyricicoccus Pullicaecorum* produce butyrate, an essential metabolite for human homeostasis and disease prevention (5) while *Lactobacillus* strains are involved in essential vitamins metabolism (6). Our study demonstrated that host genotype and diet may alter gut microbiota. Both, bacterial diversity and individual bacterial strain relative abundances changed significantly based on diet and genotype, and Nrf2 KO genotype showed stronger effects on the bacterial diversity than diet. *Firmicutes*, *Bacteroidetes* and *Proteobacteria*, the most abundant bacterial phyla, have been altered by both, diet and Nrf2 KO. Individual bacteria at different taxonomic levels showed a pattern of being consistently affected by both, genotype and diet. For instance, *Firmicutes Ruminococcus* was found in higher relative abundance in the PEITC-added diet groups and in Nrf2 KO mice.

Ruminococcus are anaerobic, gram-positive bacteria and belong to the phylum of Firmicutes. So far, eleven Ruminococcus species have been identified and fall into bacterial family Ruminococcaeae and Lachnospiraceae (64, 65). Previous studies showed that Ruminococcus degraded and fermented cellulosic biomass into short-chain fatty acid (SCFA) for herbivorous ruminants (66, 67, 68). Ruminococcus Torques was reported to be abundant in the irritable bowel syndrome subjects in a placebo control double blind study (69). Multiple probiotic interventions were able to reduce Ruminococcus Torques abundance significantly based on results obtained from quantitative real-time polymerase chain reaction (qPCR), suggesting that Ruminococcus Torques may be used as biomarker in evaluating probiotic activity. As a part of normal flora in gastrointestinal tract, another Ruminococcus species, Gnavus showed to be in high abundance in the IBD patients, with increased level of oxidative stress in the gut (70), potentially caused by cytokine production such as TNF-a (71). Firmicutes has also been reported to be overpopulated

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in infants who developed respiratory and skin allergic diseases (72). Mice orally garaged by purified *Ruminococcus Gnavus* also developed airway inflammation by cytokine secretion such as interleukins 25 and 33. This study showed significant increase in the abundance of *Firmcutes Ruminoccus* in fecal samples at the late but not at the early timepoints irrespective of diet and genotype. Aging has been linked to the accumulation of harmful inflammatory bacteria in the guts but in this study, we found that the increased level of *Firmucutes Ruminoccus* was mainly associated with Nrf2 KO suggesting that Nrf2 KO accelerates the increase of *Firmucutes*

associated with Nrf2 KO suggesting that Nrf2 KO accelerates the increase of *Firmucutes Ruminoccus*'s relative abundance. This suggests that Nrf2 might play an important role in regulating the gut microbiota profile and suppress pathogenic species such as *Firmucutes Ruminoccus* as the animal age.

Interestingly, we also observed that the phylum *Ruminoccus* were elevated at the early timepoint in the PEITC groups. *Bacteroidetes Rikenella* was also found significantly elevated in Nrf2 KO groups, suggesting that it may correlate with gut diseases (73, 74, 75, 76). Overall, genetic KO (mutation) has a strong impact on the host microbiota profile over time and should be considered as a biomarker when developing probiotic or microbiota intervention therapy in the future.

The current study suggests a strong association of mice genotype with gut microbiome richness, diversity and composition. However, a number of factors might have contributed to some of the observed variability. In a mouse study, the cage effect, i.e., housing arrangement of the animals, and individual mouse-to-mouse differences were attributed to explain up to 32% and 46% of gut microbiome composition variability, respectively (77). Possible ways to reduce the background noise in these studies include equalizing the microbiomes at baseline by feeding the animals with a control diet for several weeks or using gnotobiotic (germ-free) mice implanted with homogenized fecal samples (78, 79, 80). We employed the former approach in this study but the amount of variability at the baseline was still noteworthy. Gnotobiotic models typically result in much more homogeneous microbiomes at the baseline, but they are not without complications as they require germ-free facilities and the animals' immune system may be affected by the lack of microbiome at the early stages of their lives. A good compromise is the use of animals pretreated with wide-spectrum antibiotics and provided with high fiber content food before implanting them with homogenized fecal samples (81).

5 Acknowledgment

62 6 Conflict of Interests

The authors declare no conflicts of interest.

7 Autor Contribution

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All authors with (*) contributed significantly to this manuscript.

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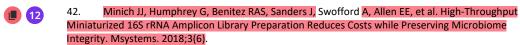


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