



Review Article

www.ijrap.net (ISSN:2229-3566)



A REVIEW ON SKIN MICROBIOME: NOVEL STRATEGY IN COSMETICS

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Received on: 25/05/21 Accepted on: 25/06/21

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DOI: 10.7897/2277-4343.120382

ABSTRACT

Human skin is the largest organ composing a complex ecosystem harbouring different types of microorganisms such as bacteria, viruses, fungi and mites that are together known as the skin microbiome. These organisms play an important role in communicating and instructing the cutaneous arm of the immune system to keep the skin healthy. Diet, hormonal imbalance, lifestyle, use of medications and cosmetics have been reported to influence the composition of skin microbiome. These factors can sometimes cause an imbalance in the microbiome leading to a condition known as 'dysbiosis'. This disruption can then lead to several skin disorders such as dandruff, acne, psoriasis, or atopic dermatitis. Hygiene products, make-up, perfume, skin cream, nail polish, soap, shampoo, shaving cream, deodorant etc. also implicated in modifying the skin microbiome. Consumers today are moving towards a simpler, cleaner and nature based products for cosmetics. Microbiome balancing skincare natural products can respond to the rising concerns of environment pollution, skin sensitivity and premature ageing. These products can enrich the skin to repair itself by boosting skins immune system and natural defence barrier. These natural products are meant to remove pathogenic but to retain the composition mutualistic organism. The skincare market has recently embraced these distinct approaches of targeting the skin microbiome through different fronts like Probiotics, Prebiotics and Postbiotics.

Keywords: Skin microbiome, prebiotics, probiotics, and cosmetics.

INTRODUCTION

Skin is considered to be the largest organ of the human body with an average surface area of 1.6–2 sq. meters and accounts for about 15% of the total body weight of an adult human¹. It is an interface with the environment and protects the body against pathogens, controls water loss, regulates the body temperature, enables sensation to be perceived².

The skin is divided into three layers namely, epidermis which is a stratified, squamous epithelium layer that is composed primarily of two types of cells: keratinocytes and dendritic cells. The keratinocytes differ from the clear dendritic cells by possessing intercellular bridges and ample amounts of stainable cytoplasm. The epidermis harbours a number of other cell populations, such as Melanocytes, Langerhans cells and Merkel cells, but the Keratinocyte cell type comprises the majority of the cells by far. Second is the basement membrane which is the multi-layered structure forming the dermo epidermal junction. The interface between the epidermis and dermis is formed by a porous basement membrane zone that allows the exchange of cells and fluid and holds the two layers together and lastly the dermis which is an integrated system of fibrous, filamentous and amorphous connective tissue that accommodates stimulus-induced entry by nerve and vascular networks, epidermally derived appendages, fibroblasts, macrophages and mast cells³. The dermis is followed by hypodermis which is the layer of loose connective tissue and fat beneath the dermis⁴.

Skin microbiome

Recently, a lot of buzz has been created by the word "microbiome" coined by Nobel Laureate Joshua Lederberg.

Microbiome is defined as the entire collection of microorganisms living either inside or outside of your body. After completion of the Human Microbiome Project in 2012, carried out by the US National Institutes of Health, the knowledge about the types and the importance of these microbes for humans came to light. Since then, it has been a hot topic in healthcare, skincare, and even the food and beverage industry, with current estimates placing the global market value of the microbiome industry at \$1.5 billion USD by 2025⁵.

The role of the microbiome in the gut is well established and has been a vital topic in the field of healthcare and nutrition. However, information on the microbes that are lurking on the surface of the skin is new and is being labelled as the latest trend in medical science and the beauty industry. According to reports by Mintel, there have been huge advances in utilization of the skin microbiome in the cosmetics market, with growth estimated at a global CAGR of 6% between 2016 and 2021. It was also reported that the use of Lactobacillus-based probiotic skincare products increased by 98% in the United States from 2013 to 2017. Moreover, some of the key players in the cosmetics industry such as Procter & Gamble, Johnson & Johnson, BASF and L'Oréal have already turned their attention toward harnessing the full potential of the skin microbiome⁶.

Human skin is the largest organ composing a complex ecosystem harbouring different types of microorganisms such as bacteria, viruses, fungi and mites that are together known as the skin microbiome. More specifically these microbes colonize the Stratum corneum of the epidermis and skin appendages such as sweat glands and hair follicles⁷.

The skin microbiome includes two groups

Resident microorganisms (the core microbiome)

Normal resident flora is microorganisms that are always present on or in a person and usually do not cause any disease. These are the permanent residents in the skin depending on the part of the body. The normal flora on skin is *staphylococci* and in mouth there are *streptococci*. Healthy people live in harmony with most of the microorganisms that establish themselves on or in (colonize) nonsterile parts of the body, such as the skin, nose, mouth, throat, large intestine, and vagina. The microorganisms that usually occupy a particular body site are called the resident flora.

Transient microorganisms (the 'tourists')

This microbiome colonizes the host for a short period of time, they sometimes are harmless or sometimes may even cause skin disease like yeast candida. Microorganisms that colonize people for hours to weeks but do not establish themselves permanently are called transient flora⁸.

Alterations of skin microbiome according to age

The skin microbiome is present from birth to death of the individual. The skin of infant is colonized by microorganisms when they are born and continues to explore surrounding environment⁹. During the infancy it is important to educate the immune system and develop susceptibility to allergic diseases by exposure to infectious agents, symbiotic microorganisms and parasites, etc¹⁰.

When they enter puberty there is production of more sebum by sebaceous gland due to increase in hormones. This condition can lead to colonization and growth of lipophilic microorganism *Propionibacterium acnes*. The change in this microbial composition can cause a common skin disease- acne vulgaris affecting 85% of adolescents and 11% of the adults¹¹.

When teenagers enter the adulthood their skin microbiome reaches the equilibrium. But during the adulthood, the level of stress is mounting in life of an individual which has remarkable impact on the skin condition. Skin being the largest neuroendocrine organ; it has its own HPA (Hypothalamic pituitary adrenal) axis to produce cortisol under stress condition. A healthy skin barrier is affected by cortisol which alters the growth of commensal *S. epidermises* which inhibit the growth of pathogenic *S. aureus*. This alteration in the skin microorganism can develop Atopic dermatitis which is a chronic inflammatory skin disease characterized by defective skin barrier and colonization of *S. aureus*¹²⁻¹⁵.

As the person grows old the skin microbiome gets altered again. There is more colonization of *Corynebacterium* and decrease in *Propionibacterium* in old individuals. Thus, an aged skin can provide more advantageous ecosystem to certain microbes than others¹⁶.

The common microorganisms found in the skin are

Propionibacterium acnes

They are found on the oily surface of the skin and hair follicles. They contribute to the development of acne as they proliferate due to excess oil production and clogged pores. They use sebum as fuel.

Corynebacterium

They are of two types pathogenic and non-pathogenic bacteria causing diphtheria which is inflammation in the throat and mucous membrane of nose and some nondiphtherial infections can cause meningitis and urinary tract infection.

Staphylococcus epidermidis

They are harmless inhabitants of skin. They form a thick biofilm barrier which is a slimy substance that protects bacteria from antibiotics, chemicals and other substance or conditions that are hazardous.

Staphylococcus aureus

They are found on the skin and mucous membranes of humans. They are usually harmless but infections can occur on broken skin or within a blocked sweat or sebaceous gland.

Streptococcus pyogenes

These bacteria cause skin infection like impetigo, abscess, broncho-pulmonary infections and can cause acute articular rheumatism¹⁶⁻¹⁸.

Factors contributing to variation in the skin microbiome

The ecology of the skin surface is influenced by many variables including lifestyle, age, emotion, community, genetics, diet, hygiene products and drugs¹⁹⁻²⁰.

Skin disorders such as atopic dermatitis, dandruff and vitiligo also affect the subjects' skin microbiome. Age-related changes in skin structure and function are attributable to combinations of endogenous intrinsic factors, e.g., cellular metabolisms, immune activity, hormone condition and exogenous environmental factors, e.g., exposure to sun, pollutants, other toxins. Under favourable conditions, an altered community of microbes can arise on the skin thus leading to conditions of dysbiosis²¹. Dysfunction of the capacity to re-establish a normal microbial community may perpetuate chronic disease including physiological injury and psychological anxiety, promoting endocrine and metabolic changes within the cutaneous microenvironments that directly impact the metabolic requirements and pathogenicity of various microorganisms

Why take advantage of skin microbiome

The skin barrier and the microbiota act like a shield that protects the body against external aggressions. There is a balanced interplay between the host and resident and/or transient bacterial populations. This balance is continuously affected by intrinsic (host) and extrinsic (environmental) factors that alter the composition of skin microorganism communities and the host skin barrier function. Altering this equilibrium is called dysbiosis²². A robust skin microbiome protects against infection or dysbiosis in much the same way a good gut microbiome does, by colonization resistance either by competing for nutrients, secreting chemicals against them or stimulating the skin's immune system and by maintaining relatively acidic environment, which inhibits growth of pathogens. The skin microbiome could lessen the effects of UV exposure by providing immune protection in the skin's cellular microenvironment²³.

A balanced microbiome may help ward off acne, as the skin microbiome's profile could be as accurate as 85% in predicting the clinical status of the skin²⁴⁻²⁵.

The major disadvantage of skin microbiome is found that even resident microbes can cause skin diseases and enter the blood system creating life-threatening diseases particularly in immune suppressed people.

Disorders caused by disruption of skin microbiome

The majority of microbiota which inhabit the skin is harmless or beneficial and crucial for host defence. The relationship is "mutualistically symbiotic". Some microbes are inherently harmful, pathogenicity only occurs when the balance of the ecosystem is disturbed, and diversity is decreased. This "perturbation" of the skin microbiome, or "dysbiosis", is responsible for many skin conditions including acne, eczema, dermatitis, rosacea, inflammation, psoriasis, general allergies, sunburn, athlete's foot and ringworm, wound healing, diabetic skin, leishmaniasis, conjunctivitis and skin cancer²⁶.

Requirement of consumer for skin care

Consumers today are moving towards simpler, cleaner and nature-based products for cosmetics. Microbiome balancing skincare natural products can respond to the rising concerns of environment pollution, skin sensitivity and premature ageing²⁷.

Cosmetic formulators have begun to explore the relationship between the human microbiome and healthy skin. These products can enrich the skin to repair itself by boosting skin's immune system and natural defence barrier. These natural products are meant to remove pathogenic but retain the composition of commensal and mutualistic organisms. The skincare market has recently embraced this distinct approach of targeting the skin microbiome through different fronts like

Probiotics

Probiotics are good bacteria in the form of either live cultures or lysates to increase the number of favourable bacteria on the skin. They improve the gut barrier function and restore the gut microecology which helps to stimulate the immune system of host and restore the alterations in the inflammatory. A regular consumption of fermented dairy products is likely to improve the natural skin barrier function and improved its cosmetic appearance. In the case of diseases with some imbalance in microorganisms, such as impure skin/mild acne or dry skin/mild atopic dermatitis, probiotic represent an effective alternative to antibacterial products²⁸. Cosmetic Industries dealing with personal care products have assessed probiotics as "bioactive ingredients" to help enhance the beauty as well as the function of the skin. These products range from topical applications like body lotion, anti-aging serum, soap, aftershave, wipes etc to ingestible products like probiotic drinks. *Lactobacillus* is the most common genus of bacteria used as the ingredient for preparation of various probiotic enzymes, ferment lysate, probiotic proteins, etc. Some bacterial metabolites like lactic acid, hyaluronic acid is also found in the list of ingredients of the probiotics. The proposed mechanism found from scientific papers suggest that the beneficial effects of probiotics in topical application may be improving barrier function of the epithelium layer or inhibiting the growth of pathogens by limiting the nutrients and producing antibiotics²⁹.

Prebiotics

They are the food source for the good bacteria promoting their growth and rebalance the skin microflora. They are usually short chain oligosaccharides or polysaccharides³⁰.

A combination of prebiotics and probiotics in skin care can be wonderful for improving skin's surface protection, ensuring skin to keep its barrier intact, smooth and healthy.

Postbiotics

Postbiotics are waste (such as dead bacterial skin cells) from certain microorganisms, which by itself helps to improve the ecosystem of the skin. Like actual live probiotics, postbiotics also help nourish your skin. They are used along with pre and probiotics. They are beneficial in that they help support the growth of "good bacteria" and can even be anti-inflammatory, so they could potentially be of help with skin conditions such as acne and rosacea.

Challenges in development of cosmetic containing Pro-prebiotic

As the beauty products have their natural shelf life, the formulation of probiotic/prebiotic skin care products is different than the fresh foods used in ailments of digestive tract. It is difficult to add actual live bacteria in cosmetic, so most of them in fact contain fragments of bacterial cell walls that can reduce immune response.

One more challenge in using probiotic/prebiotic in the development of cosmetic is that there is diverse need of skin microflora of the individual and even the microflora present on different body parts is inherently different³¹⁻³².

CONCLUSION

The skin microbiome as a beauty concept is upending popular notions about bacteria's involvement in the skin. Beauty influencers are receptive to the idea of the skin as a living ecosystem which needs more natural, holistic and healthy beauty³³. Currently, the cosmetic industry is mostly focused on prebiotic and probiotic solutions. Probiotics are commonly associated with gut health and live dairy products, yet it should be noted that when it comes to cosmetics, products contain extracts manufactured from bacteria rather than live cultures³⁴. Some firms take a scientific approach with products that address specific concerns and benefits, such as wrinkle reduction, while others focus on nature, total skin health, holistic living and green beauty³⁵. There is plenty of opportunity to innovate and also from skin microbiome-friendly cleansers and moisturizers to skin microbiome-enhancing probiotic mists and serums.

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Cite this article as:

Disha P Prajapati and Tanvi R Dodiya. A Review on Skin microbiome: Novel Strategy in Cosmetics. *Int. J. Res. Ayurveda Pharm.* 2021;12(3):99-102 <http://dx.doi.org/10.7897/2277-4343.120382>

Source of support: Nil, Conflict of interest: None Declared

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