



The Human Superorganism: How the Microbiome Is Revolutionizing the Pursuit of a Healthy Life

Rodney Dietert

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"Eyeopening... Fascinating... may presage a paradigm shift in medicine."

--*Kirkus Reviews* (starred review)

"Teeming with information and big ideas... Outstanding."

--*Booklist* (starred review)

The origin of asthma, autism, Alzheimer's, allergies, cancer, heart disease, obesity, and even some kinds of depression is now clear. Award-winning researcher on the microbiome, professor Rodney Dietert presents a new paradigm in human biology that has emerged in the midst of the ongoing global epidemic of noncommunicable diseases.

The Human Superorganism makes a sweeping, paradigm-shifting argument. It demolishes two fundamental beliefs that have blinkered all medical thinking until very recently: 1) Humans are better off as pure organisms free of foreign microbes; and 2) the human genome is the key to future medical advances. The microorganisms that we have sought to eliminate have been there for centuries supporting our ancestors. They comprise as much as 90 percent of the cells in and on our bodies--a staggering percentage! More than a thousand species of them live inside us, on our skin, and on our very eyelashes. Yet we have now significantly reduced their power and in doing so have sparked an epidemic of noncommunicable diseases--which now account for 63 percent of all human deaths.

Ultimately, this book is not just about microbes; it is about a different way to view humans. The story that Dietert tells of where the new biology comes from, how it works, and the ways in which it affects your life is fascinating, authoritative, and revolutionary. Dietert identifies foods that best serve you, the superorganism; not new fad foods but ancient foods that have made sense for millennia. He explains protective measures against unsafe chemicals and drugs. He offers an empowering self-care guide and the blueprint for a revolution in public health. We are not what we have been taught. Each of us is a superorganism. The best path to a healthy life is through recognizing that profound truth.

The Human Superorganism: How the Microbiome Is Revolutionizing the Pursuit of a Healthy Life Details

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Andrew says

An intriguing summary of the emerging field of microbiome research. The topic is quite complex but the author keeps the reader engaged with stories, history and anecdotes.

The human body's main features come from DNA and microbiomes. These super-organisms regulate everything from the immune system to activating certain genes. The book starts with a slew of research citations to back up his initial argument but then slowly digresses into futurism.

This book is fascinating and I will definitely read more from Dietert.

Rosa says

THE HUMAN SUPERORGANISM conveys a new paradigm expressed in the book's title: "We each are a superorganism made up of thousands of species, biologically diverse." In contrast, the current paradigm only considers the human mammalian genome.

With or without our awareness, we are taking care of our organism in a more holistic way if we consume fermented foods as our ancestors did. However, knowledge of cause is powerful that's why I enjoyed this book. Even though, because of the title, it could be perceived to address experts or students in topics as immunotoxicology as the author Rodney Dietert, PhD, but not really, the author stated his wife transformed his scientific language for readers with no expertise to understand.

CONTENT:

PART ONE: A SHIFT IN HOW WE THINK ABOUT BIOLOGY

PART TWO: A REVOLUTION IN MEDICINE

PART THREE: CARING FOR YOURSELF

THE HUMAN SUPERORGANISM will encourage you to know more about the microbial genome, from what it is, passing through non-communicative (NCDs) diseases epidemic as obesity, cancer, allergies, depression, among others, to why the same perfume smells differently on different people.

You won't find much about parasitism in this book as its main focus is on mutualism and commensalism.

THE HUMAN SUPERORGANISM has a futuristic outcome for the main stream – how long would it take? – as long as it pervades to the public and influence governments' policies, pharmaceutical, medical, and food industries to acknowledge this paradigm, and make required changes, meanwhile, for a minority this 'futuristic' approach has been here for a long time as doctors, food business owners and people of every walk of life, aware and concern with these chronic diseases, have taken charge of their health with a more holistic approach for decades.

Nowadays, this super-organism the author resembles to a tropical rain-forest or a coral reef ecosystem is

endangered as diseases for NCDs epidemic keep growing, until changes occurred where prevention of disease would be a priority instead of profit in expense of humanity well-being.

Joseph Hellion says

A fascinating account and summary of the emerging field of microbiome research. The author uses the anecdotes, simplifications, digressions, optimism for radical transformations and personal stories that are the standard format of pop science books of this kind. I have only two complaints : first, the author seems so keen on leaving his microbiome on the shoulders of giants who support him. This includes ceaselessly defecating on giants from Darwin to Dawkins that is beyond the necessary rebuttal that is expected of him given the subject matter. Second, the book is sometimes unnecessarily anthropocentric and do not dwell on the idea that all species and all biology, human and non-human alike, is that of superorganisms. But I guess if microbes drive our cravings, moods and most of our biology we are still so special than dogs who do not need science pop books to tell them about the microbiome, since they have been sniffing the beautiful biology of butts, knowing that secret. However, I understand that dogs are not a good market for pop science books.

Beyond the aforementioned complaints, the book remains fascinating and mind opening. Worth a read.

Paul says

Be wary of a person who found a hammer. Book doesn't explain any details. Makes lots of observations of correlations and implies far reaching and unsupported claims like links of autism and microbial biomes. The final chapters claim to offer advice but have zero actionable information but that's a good thing since this science is less proven than the author would have you think which should be apparent from the lack of any explanation of how the processes work to create the effects they are correlated with. Incredibly repetitive with the same central claim stated over and over trying to convince by repetition rather than argument.

Maxmaliska says

While the topic is interesting and there were some good points to take in, overall this book was disappointing. As a scientist, I was hoping to hear about up-to-date science into the human superorganism, the microbiome, metagenomics, and understand better where this field is and where it is going. I did not get that with this book. The main points were never clear, many topics were reiterated, and diatribes offered little to nothing about the underlying theme, for which there wasn't one. Plus, most of the points approached in the book were not backed by scientific evidence and were just arguments for in the far-off future where this field could go. This last point was the most disappointing, because it shows how far off this field is, if there are no clear links of microbiome-related causes to disease, then there is still a massive amount of work to do to tease these things apart. What I was hoping for in this last point would be a path or direction to get to an understanding of non-communicable disease and the relationship with the microbiome, but as of this book being written, there is only large-scale correlative evidence.

David Meyer says

The topic (the importance of a balanced microbiome in humans) is interesting. Unfortunately, the author makes too many audacious claims for my taste, while not actually backing them up with studies. The author discusses the subject as if the science is finished, but doesn't truly have a lot of action for the reader to take even if they did completely buy the concept. Hopefully, more work will be done on the subject, and if appropriate, this will take on a larger role in healthcare.

Bradley says

I'm extremely impressed with this book.

It's very well documented, including both primary research and building on four decades of game-changing discoveries. Far from being dry, it happens to be both amazingly exciting and potentially a life saver for us all.

What the hell? Am I blowing the lid off of this non-fiction book?

Possibly yes, possibly no. The fact is, nothing in here is wholly unique. The emphasis and the well-reasoned possibility and direction of future research is.

So what is this about? Put simply, or even extremely simply, is that we are made up of two sets of genomes. The mammalian genome topping out at about 22k base pairs making up about 10% of our body's biology, and the other 90% of the genomes which work in concert with all of our mammalian parts to convert energy and regulate EVERYTHING else. They the true puppeteers of our lives and it has been that way since the very beginning, and just as true for every other living creature on the planet. We are each Biomes of huge complexity, and what was more interesting, at least to me, is learning that our guts are only a small part of the picture. Every part of our body is made up of particular regulatory patches of bacteria working in concert. If they fall out of balance or if a particularly clever subset fills a vacuum caused by a particular die-off, then we get sick, increase our chances for huge numbers of non-communicable diseases.

Antibiotics cause obesity.

Get it? The proper flora dies with the disease and then weakens us to further complications. That's pretty standard stuff to learn these days and we get it. The problem is, the normal biological model is slow to catch up and treat the whole SYSTEM, including research into methods of increasing not just classes of bacterial strains, but even long, long lists of specific ones, including *Akkermansia muciniphila*, which has been shown to specifically reduce abdominal fat, and I'm just mentioning only this one.

The rest of the short list in this book targets a lot more than just obesity. It turns out that the widest range of non-communicable diseases are covered here as well: from depression, obesity, cancer, heart disease, autism, Alzheimer's disease, to a much longer possible list.

You've heard that processed and pasteurized foods are directly contributing to a loss of our personal Biotas, right? That once we stopped fermenting our foods and stopped eating raw, then completely different sets of not particularly helpful bacteria sets up camp in our guts and skin and every other part of our bodies, right?

Hell, I'll attest to the viability of everything here. I changed my diet to 50% raw greens and suddenly discovered that I was no longer depressed, lost the gastrointestinal maladies, lost weight, had a brighter outlook on life, got better sleep, and generally became a new man. WHO KNEW? lol This was years ago for me, and the changes remained because I encouraged a new biota in my gut.

This book takes it further, with TONS of reference material taking up 1/4 of the book, calling out for a change in our biological outlook, ending in a change in paradigm.

So it turns out that if we treat our symbiotic partners as PARTNERS, they can heal us directly. Huh. Who'd have thunk? The fact that our healthy and natural bodies are only *slightly* mammalian, that the fully mapped Human Genome Project surprised the living hell out of us with the realization that (*we* as in our Human DNA) is only about a 1% of a person's complete biota, and that in treating only it, we're basically spitting in the wind.

The trick is to recolonize our biota, to have a very specific game plan for each individual, since while there's over 10,000 bacterial species that work closely with mankind, any one of us might have somewhere around a 1000 of them in current residence, and it's pretty plain that mothers pass along anywhere between 42% to 78% of their "additional" biota to their babies at birth, so similarities ARE genetically passed on, but only a small portion of those genetic similarities are human. It is worth noting that the range I just mentioned represents C-Section babies or those that actually travel through the vagina. C-Section babies, unbeknownst to most of modern medicine, leaves our babies, (including myself and my daughter) with incomplete biota, leaving us a LOT more susceptible to autism and all the other non-communicable diseases I mentioned.

Autism used to be rare, but now it hits 1/68 children. That's a 500% increase in 40 years and it's only getting worse. This isn't even a selection bias.

Fortunately, the term Rebiosis is a bit of a hopeful term, because it means bringing us back into a healthy biota at any age. It's MOST important for newborns, but of course we could all use a break from peanut and wheat allergies, asthma, irritable bowel syndrome, even anxiety and depression by JUST GETTING THE BALANCE RIGHT. Huh. Cool.

Modern medicine has a lot of research it still has to do, but we as a people really need to be aware that this isn't some fad. We are a lot more than a single set of genes and we've known this for a very long time. It's time to treat the whole system and stop trying to just treat the Mammal.

I know I'm not doing the book great justice with just this little blurb. It deserves to be read and digested for yourself. Pun not intentional.

(Or maybe it was, a little.)

Thanks goes to Netgalley for this wonderful book!

Son Tung says

Simply an eye-opening read on the importance of Microbiome for human body, health and medicine. I had quite a hard time following names of bacteria, archaea species (but I guess I won't remember most of them).

Dan Graser says

Rodney Dietert's introductory work on the microbiome - that being the 90% of your body's cells that are non-human bacteria and archaea - is a well-researched and lucidly presented work that not only effectively introduces this fascinating area of modern biology and its future ramifications in pharmacology and nutrition science, but gives several practical suggestions as to how to incorporate this knowledge into your own personal nutrition. There are several works on the market right now that are discussing this issue with more specificity in certain areas (effect on the brain, effect on longevity, etc...) but Dietert's work is perhaps the best broad-view introduction though he does focus on the rise of NCD's (non-communicable diseases) as a result of the damage we have done to our microbiome. Interesting reading that is very well-presented.

Hakan Jackson says

Just when you think science is slowing down, it finds a bunch of more stuff to figure out. This book's findings, if hold true, will necessitate the rewriting of a lot of books. I'm already feeling impatient to read more on this topic.

Clumsy Storyteller says

We're labeled as mammals, a single specie « homo sapiens » according to the old taxonomy, but that's wrong, instead we each are a super organisme made up of thousands of species, biologically diverse! BE PROUD.

This was a very insightful educating book. i already knew most of the informations in this book since i'm Geneticist and i took Microbiology and Molecular microbiology (i hate this one so frigging much) classes, i remember i had a project about the molecular basis of evolution of NHR plasmid in new unfavorable hosts And i started searching for it but when i couldn't find anything i went on a YouTube spiral that started with Ted talks about religion by Daniel Dennett and ended much later with me watching keeping up with the kardashians, after closing youtube i decided to look for something meaningful and educating. that's how i found this book and i'm glad i did. the only thing that really bugged me and made my feminist side furious is when he talked about the discovery of the structure of DNA and gave all the credit to Watson and crick, i was like DAFQU? Without Rosalind frankling's notes these two would have never made it, i'm surprised that people still give these scientists credit for something they had very little to do with. ANYWAY, Great simple book, even those who are not in the microbiology/biology field could understand it. my professor always says that "if you can simplify a complex ideas and mechanisms that means you understood it"

Korrie Johnston says

wow! a total shift in how to consider being and staying healthy and impacts of your choices on disease and immune deficiencies. based on decades of research and study (with more to go), im a total believer. wanted more recommendations at end of book, but understand thats the whole point ...there is no pill/universal

solution to your personal microbiome health.

Kevin says

I do research in this field. This book is a decent review of gut microbiome science, but the author vastly overstates much of the research in the area. Read for an overview of an important and fascinating area of research, but keep in mind that the actual health claims being made by the author are supported by very little evidence. Time will tell whether his recommendations bear out, or are lost as statistical noise. I would recommend Blaser's 'Missing Microbes' or Yong's 'I Contain Multitudes' for more measured and accurate representations of what is known about the gut microbiota.

Patrick Todd says

Good introduction to the microbiome. I think some of the linkages between NCDs and the microbiome are a little stretched though. No doubt there is some impact but it's probably due to myriad factors rather than some explicit causality. Overall I'm glad I read this book and welcome further scientific research into this field.

Otto Lehto says

Vaginal fluids as the messiah. How would you react if you learnt that the microbes in, on and around your body could be the key to your physical and mental well-being? This is the enthusiastic claim made here. And it's certainly a thought-provoking assertion. The metaphor of the "superorganism" represents the claim that human being cannot be understood in isolation of the bacterial and archaean colonies that live inside it and help it survive and thrive.

If true, this paradigm could herald a new age in medicine and health - or just be another fad, like so many others before it. As a non-professional, it's impossible to tell the truth from reading this messianic book, because it doesn't give an unbiased and balanced picture. Instead, all bets are placed on the microbiome as the key to solving all our problems.

Some of the claims are quite confident. Too confident. The eating of fermented foods as part of a probiotic diet is postulated as the key to curing everything from stomach ulcers to preventing cancers, depression and schizophrenia. A lot of blame is placed on processed foods, the overuse of antibiotics and the overclinical nature of modern medicine. As an example of the paradigm shift at play here, a far-fetched claim is made about the importance of the vaginal microbiome of the mother, as transmitted to the baby in childbirth, in predetermining the future health of the baby.

My hunch is that the author makes a lot of unsubstantiated claims that have not been rigorously put into the test of medical practice. The style of the book is too messianic. It is, of course, exciting to be part of a paradigm shift in medicine. But one should proceed carefully. The multi-causal etiology of diseases is blatantly ignored in the book, and the importance of antibiotic medication in preventing deaths is put aside. The dangers of raw milk are likewise set aside as pasteurization is casually demonized. On the other hand, the benefits of probiotics are made to rely on anecdotes and selective studies. This is a sure sign that the full benefits and risks have not been adequately dealt with.

The book has certainly made me curious to see where the research goes next, but it was a slight disappointment to see the author get caught up in his own hype, thus making it less likely that the true importance of microbiotic health will be revealed to the scientific establishment. And it also makes it more likely that the scientifically illiterate public will fail to take proper medical advice into account.

This blindness to reason and evidence is a shame, since the central take home message of the book is important: as we understand more of the complex nature of the "ecosystem" of our own bodies, we can learn to sustain a healthy balance of food, diet and exercise, and to avoid environmental toxins that disturb this balance.
