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Oral Microbiome - A New Frontier In Oral and Human Health: A Literature Review

Kris Ke Shyang See[2*], Miew Leng Khoo[2], Kishan Kannan Yogaratnam[1], Wai Hong Cheang[1], Amarpreet Kaur Sarjit Singh[1], Low Jun Kuang[1], Kalichandren Arumugam[1], Khang Lyn Tan[1], Romel Mario Soyza[1], Hui Ying Teh[1], Nik Nassyiradina Putri Binti Nik Ahmat[1], Norizan Binti Hassan[1], Ananyaa Sreekumar[1], Joyner Lim Sue May[3]

[1] Osel Clinic, Osel Group, Malaysia

[2]Osel Diagnostics, Osel Group, Malaysia

[3]Tiew Dental Group, Malaysia

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[*]**Corresponding author:** Kris Ke Shyang See, Osel Diagnostics, Osel Group, Malaysia

ABSTRACT

The oral microbiome has emerged as a critical focus in understanding the interconnectedness of oral and systemic health. This microbial community, comprising bacteria, fungi, viruses, and archaea, plays a vital role in maintaining homeostasis and contributing to disease when dysbiosis occurs. Recent advances in sequencing technologies have facilitated a deeper understanding of the oral microbiome's composition, functions, and its implications for human health. This literature review highlights the role of the oral microbiome in oral diseases and systemic conditions, its potential as a diagnostic and therapeutic target, and future directions in microbiome research.

Keywords: Oral microbiome, Dysbiosis, Systemic health, Periodontal disease, Microbial therapies, Microbiota-host interactions.

INTRODUCTION

The oral microbiome represents one of the most diverse microbial ecosystems in the human body, with over 700 species of bacteria and other microorganisms colonizing the oral cavity [1]. While traditionally studied within the

context of dental caries and periodontal diseases, the oral microbiome is increasingly recognized for its broader impact on systemic health. Oral microbiota interact with host immune mechanisms, serving as both protectors and potential disruptors of health [2].

Advancements in metagenomics and microbiome analysis have enabled researchers to explore the oral microbiome as a key player in conditions such as cardiovascular disease, diabetes, and even neurodegenerative disorders. As such, the oral microbiome represents a new frontier in oral and systemic health research, offering diagnostic, preventive, and therapeutic opportunities.

Composition of the Oral Microbiome

The oral microbiome is a dynamic system that varies by site within the mouth. The tongue, teeth, gums, and saliva harbor distinct microbial communities[3]. Dominant bacterial genera include Streptococcus, Fusobacterium, Veillonella, and Prevotella. Fungi such as Candida albicans and viruses, including bacteriophages, also contribute to the oral microbial ecosystem [4].

This microbial diversity supports a balanced ecosystem that contributes to health. Commensal bacteria help prevent colonization by pathogenic species through competition for nutrients and the production of antimicrobial compounds [5].

Dysbiosis and Oral Diseases

Dental Caries

Dental caries result from shifts in microbial composition favoring acidogenic and aciduric bacteria, such as Streptococcus mutans and Lactobacillus species [6]. These organisms metabolize dietary sugars into organic acids, leading to enamel demineralization and cavitation.

Periodontal Disease and Rheumatoid Arthritis

Periodontal disease is a chronic inflammatory condition of the gums that leads to tooth loss and is caused by the imbalance of microbial communities in the oral cavity. The association between periodontal disease and RA is supported by findings suggesting that periodontitis can exacerbate systemic inflammation, which may be a contributing factor to the development of RA. Specific bacteria in the oral cavity, such as Porphyromonas gingivalis and Aggregatibacter actinomycetemcomitans, have been shown to induce immune responses that can result in autoimmune diseases like RA [7]. Our knowledge of the microbiota of periodontal disease associated with health and disease has expanded exponentially in the past few decades. Periodontitis is a chronic multifactorial inflammatory disease associated with dysbiotic plaque biofilms and characterized by progressive destruction of the

tooth-supporting apparatus resulting in tooth loss in some patients [8]. Periodontal disease involves a shift toward pathogenic species, including Porphyromonas gingivalis and Tannerella forsythia. These bacteria disrupt immune responses and trigger chronic inflammation, resulting in tissue destruction and alveolar bone loss [9].

Systemic Implications of Oral Microbiome Dysbiosis

Cardiovascular Disease

Oral pathogens such as P. gingivalis have been linked to atherosclerosis through mechanisms including systemic inflammation and endothelial dysfunction. Bacterial components like lipopolysaccharides can migrate to distant sites, promoting vascular plaque formation .

Diabetes Mellitus

The oral microbiome and diabetes share a bidirectional relationship. Dysbiosis exacerbates glycemic control, while hyperglycemia enhances the inflammatory response to periodontal pathogens [10].

Obesity

The oral microbiome also interacts with dietary patterns, which influence both the oral and gut microbiomes. High-sugar diets, for instance, promote the growth of cariogenic and pro-inflammatory oral bacteria that may contribute to obesity. S. mutans is particularly associated with high-sugar consumption, and it has been suggested that its overgrowth may be a risk factor for both dental caries and obesity.

Neurodegenerative Disorders

Emerging research suggests a link between the oral microbiome and neurodegenerative diseases such as Alzheimer's. Pathogens like P. gingivalis have been detected in brain tissues, suggesting that oral bacteria may contribute to neuroinflammation and cognitive decline [11].

Gastrointestinal Disorders

The oral microbiome influences the gut microbiome via the oral-gut axis. For instance, Fusobacterium nucleatum has been implicated in colorectal cancer progression by modulating immune responses and promoting tumor growth [12].

The Oral Microbiome as a Diagnostic and Therapeutic Target

Microbiome-Based Diagnostics

Oral microbiome profiling is being explored as a diagnostic tool for both oral and systemic conditions. Specific microbial signatures have been linked to diseases such as colorectal cancer, allowing for non-invasive screening [13].

Probiotics and Prebiotics

Probiotics such as Lactobacillus and Bifidobacterium species can modulate the oral microbiome by promoting beneficial bacteria and reducing pathogenic species. Prebiotics, which support beneficial microbial growth, are also being investigated.

Microbiome Restoration

Techniques such as microbial transplantation and targeted antimicrobial therapies aim to restore microbial balance. For example, preclinical studies have shown promise in transplanting healthy microbiota to treat periodontal diseases [14].

Future Directions

The oral microbiome represents a growing area of research with implications for personalized medicine. Future studies should focus on the longitudinal effects of oral microbiome changes and explore the use of artificial intelligence to analyze complex microbiome-host interactions [15].

CONCLUSION

The oral microbiome is a critical mediator of oral and systemic health. Its role extends beyond traditional dental diseases, influencing conditions such as cardiovascular disease, diabetes, and neurodegenerative disorders. Advances in microbiome research are paving the way for innovative diagnostic and therapeutic strategies, solidifying the oral microbiome as a new frontier in health science.

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