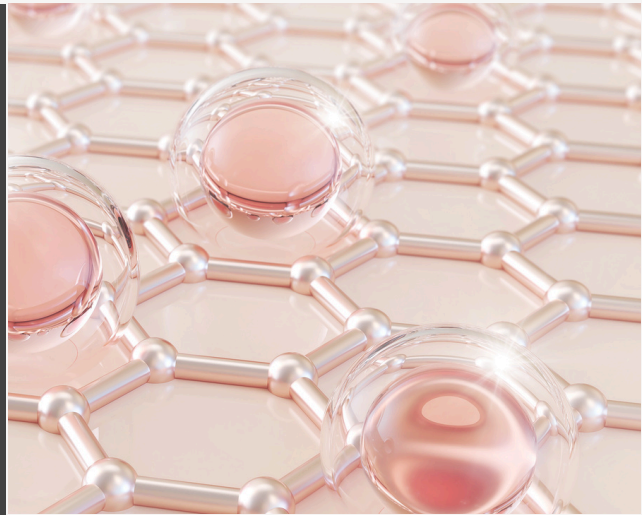


# The Microbiome and Its Impact on Sensitive and Sensitized Skin

by Shawna Rocha



In recent years, the term “microbiome” has become a buzzword in both the scientific and skincare communities. Far from a passing trend, the microbiome is proving to be a cornerstone of skin health, especially for individuals with sensitive or sensitized skin. But what exactly is the microbiome, and how does it influence the skin’s sensitivity? With the increase in clientele with sensitive skin conditions, it is important to understand the relationship between the microbiome and skin health.

## What is the Skin Microbiome?

The skin microbiome refers to the diverse community of microorganisms, including bacteria, fungi, viruses, and other microbes, that live on the skin’s surface. These microorganisms form a complex ecosystem that works symbiotically with our body, playing a vital role in maintaining skin health and integrity.

A healthy microbiome acts as a natural defense mechanism, protecting the skin from harmful pathogens, regulating inflammation, and maintaining the skin's pH balance. It is an essential component of the skin’s barrier function (which is a major symptom for those with sensitive skin), and

assists to shield the body from environmental stressors and prevents moisture loss.

## Sensitive vs Sensitized Skin

To understand how the microbiome impacts skin sensitivity, it’s important to distinguish between sensitive and sensitized skin:

- **Sensitive skin** is often a chronic condition caused by genetic predispositions, such as rosacea or eczema. These conditions are characterized by a compromised barrier and heightened reactivity to environmental triggers.
- **Sensitized skin** refers to skin that has developed temporary sensitivity due to external factors such as over-exfoliation, harsh skincare products, pollution, temporary internal issues or extreme weather.



## How the Microbiome Affects Sensitive Skin

The microbiome's primary function is to maintain balance within the skin's ecosystem. When this delicate balance is disrupted, a condition known as dysbiosis occurs. Dysbiosis can result in an overgrowth of harmful bacteria and a decline in beneficial microbes, leading to inflammation, irritation, and a weakened skin barrier.

For individuals with naturally sensitive skin, a poorly functioning microbiome can exacerbate symptoms such as redness, dryness, inflammation, and discomfort. Conditions like rosacea and eczema are often linked to microbial imbalances, suggesting that maintaining a healthy microbiome is crucial for managing these issues.

## The Role of the Microbiome in Sensitized Skin

Sensitized skin, which is typically a result of environmental or lifestyle factors, often exhibits signs of dysbiosis as well. Aggressive skincare routines, frequent use of antibiotics, and environmental pollution can strip the skin of its natural oils and beneficial bacteria, leaving it vulnerable to irritants.

When the microbiome is compromised, the skin's barrier becomes less effective at retaining moisture, increasing TEWL (transepidermal water loss) and becomes less effective against external aggressors. This can result in increased sensitivity, redness, and irritation.

## Restoring Balance: How to Support a Healthy Microbiome

Maintaining a healthy microbiome is critical for reducing sensitivity and restoring the skin's natural defenses. Here are some strategies to support a balanced microbiome:

### 1. Gentle Cleansing

Avoid harsh cleansers that strip the skin of its natural oils and disrupt the microbiome. Opt for mild, pH-balanced cleansers that respect the skin's barrier.

### 2. Probiotic and Prebiotic Skincare

Probiotic skincare products introduce beneficial bacteria to the skin, while prebiotics serve as food for these microorganisms, encouraging their growth. Together, they help restore microbial balance and strengthen the skin's defenses.

### 3. Barrier Repair

Use products with ingredients like ceramides, fatty acids, niacinamide, and other targeted ingredients to repair and fortify the skin's barrier. A strong barrier supports a healthy microbiome.



#### 4. Avoid Over-Exfoliation

Over-exfoliation can strip the skin of its protective layer and disrupt the microbiome. Limit exfoliation to once or twice a week and use gentle exfoliants.

#### 5. Protect Against Environmental Stressors

Pollution and UV radiation can negatively impact the microbiome. Incorporate antioxidants and broad-spectrum sunscreen into your routine to shield your skin.

#### 6. Focus on Internal Health

A balanced diet rich in probiotics (found in yogurt, kefir, and fermented foods) and prebiotics (found in fiber-rich foods like fruits and vegetables) can support the skin's microbiome from within. Proper supplementation can also effect guy microbiome with is also immediately reflected in skin health and ongoing skin conditions (acne).



#### The Future of Microbiome Skincare

As research on the microbiome advances, the skincare industry is developing targeted treatments designed to address microbial imbalances. These innovations include microbiome-friendly formulations, postbiotic ingredients, and diagnostic tools to assess the health of an individual's skin microbiome.

By understanding the pivotal role the microbiome plays in skin health, we can develop more effective strategies for managing sensitive and sensitized skin. Restoring microbial balance not only helps alleviate symptoms but also supports long-term skin resilience and overall well-being.

#### Conclusion

The microbiome is an essential yet often overlooked factor in the health of sensitive and sensitized skin. By nurturing and protecting this microscopic ecosystem, we can enhance the skin's natural defenses, reduce sensitivity, and pave the way for healthier, more radiant skin. Whether through skincare products, lifestyle changes, or advancements in microbiome science, the future of sensitive skin care lies in embracing the power of the microbiome.



**Shawna Rocha**

Hale & Hush Director of Education