

# A Healthier You



## Also in this issue:

- **BenefitHub Member Perks Program**
- **Paws on the Road: Tips for a dog-friendly vacation**
- **Annual Meeting Proxy**

The On-Demand Independent Contractors Association (ODICA) is dedicated to supporting the growing community of independent contractors in today's on-demand economy. Whether you're a driver, delivery professional, freelancer, or gig worker, ODICA is here to help you succeed. We provide our members with access to valuable benefits, services, and resources—all designed to be cost-effective and tailored to the unique needs of independent workers.

## The World Inside Your Mouth: How Mouth Microbes Affect Your Health

There's much more to your mouth than your teeth, gums, and tongue. Your mouth also contains billions of tiny critters that can only be seen with a microscope. These are called microbes. Together, all the microbes living in your mouth are known as the oral microbiome.

Scientists believe the oral microbiome can contribute to diseases both in the mouth and elsewhere in the body. That means research into these microbes might lead to new ways to prevent and treat many illnesses.

### Who's in There?

Your mouth makes a lovely neighborhood for microbes. And many different types can move in. Scientists believe roughly 700 species of microbes live in the human mouth. Some of these may contribute to diseases. Others help keep disease-causing microbes from taking over.



health is linked to a higher risk for Alzheimer's disease. That may be because not taking proper care of your teeth makes your mouth a friendlier place for disease-causing bacteria.

"We think the type of bacteria that live in the mouth might secrete substances that can get into your bloodstream,

"It's a natural, normal part of life to have these microbes living in your mouth," says Dr. Christian Abnet, an oral cancer researcher at NIH. "Even people with good oral hygiene have a thriving microbiome in their mouth."

The set of microbes in a person's mouth usually doesn't change much over time, at least in adults. When it does change, it can be bad news.

"People tend to have certain microbes in specific proportions," says Dr. Akintunde Emiola, a researcher who studies the oral microbiome at NIH. "When that proportion changes, that can be linked to diseases.

But which specific microbes are linked to diseases isn't clear. Researchers are trying to figure out how microbe changes in the mouth play a role in disease.

## Beyond the Mouth

One kind of microbe that can wreak havoc in the mouth is bacteria. Dentists are well-known for pointing out that sugar-loving bacteria can harm your teeth and gums. These live in the plaque that dentists scrape off your teeth.

But the influence of these microbes is not confined to the mouth. Mouth microbes have been linked to a wide variety of diseases outside the mouth. These include cancer, heart disease, diabetes, allergies, asthma, and even Alzheimer's disease.

For example, studies have shown that poor oral

go into the brain, and cause things to go awry," says Dr. Colin Combs, an expert in neurodegenerative diseases at the University of North Dakota.

Combs' team has found a substance linked to Alzheimer's disease inside our mouths. Beta-amyloid is a hallmark of Alzheimer's disease. In the brain, it clumps together into "plaques." But Combs' work recently showed that beta-amyloid is also in saliva.

His team is researching how beta-amyloid in saliva affects mouth microbes, and vice versa. They're trying to figure out whether beta-amyloid in the mouth plays a role in Alzheimer's disease, too.

Cancer may also be influenced by the oral microbiome. Abnet's studies have linked certain mouth microbes to a higher risk for cancer in the lungs, colon, and esophagus.

Abnet explains that there are a few ways mouth microbes might promote cancer. One is that certain bacteria produce substances that cause cancer. These are called carcinogens.

The oral microbiome can also affect the defenses that protect you from germs. Those defenses are called the immune system. One of the ways it fights off germs is with a reaction called inflammation. Inflammation is linked to many diseases, including cancer and Alzheimer's disease.

Changes to the immune system might also explain

## Be Good To Your Microbes

You can promote a healthier oral microbiome by:

- Taking good care of your teeth and gums. That includes daily brushing and flossing and regular dentist visits.
- Eating a healthy diet, especially one that is low in added sugar.
- Drinking less alcohol.
- Avoiding tobacco products, including electronic cigarettes.

how mouth microbes affect allergies. An allergy occurs when the immune system overreacts to something that's normally harmless. Take, for instance, peanut allergy in kids. One study showed that when kids have certain mouth bacteria, it takes a smaller amount of peanut to trigger a reaction.

Knowing how mouth microbes are linked to diseases might one day help us create new treatments.

"Figuring out the mechanisms is really important if you want to design an intervention," Abnet says.

### Managing Our Microbes

Getting rid of disease-causing microbes in our mouths is easier said than done. There are medications that kill microbes, called antibiotics. But current antibiotics kill off all kinds of microbes, not just harmful ones. That's why Emiola's team is working on more precise ways to destroy disease-causing microbes.

"When you kill all of the microbes, the problematic ones tend to repopulate faster," Emiola says. "But if you specifically target the bad microbes, that allows the good ones to repopulate the environment."

His lab is looking for viruses that only infect specific bacteria. These viruses are called bacteriophages. Using bacteriophages that prey only on specific bacteria in the mouth could be a way to get rid of disease-causing microbes.

Emiola's group is also trying to create medications that only harm certain bacteria. To do that, he's

relying on treatments called prodrugs. "Prodrugs are compounds that are normally inactive," Emiola says.

But the prodrugs he is developing become active once inside specific bacteria. And when they're activated, they work like antibiotics.

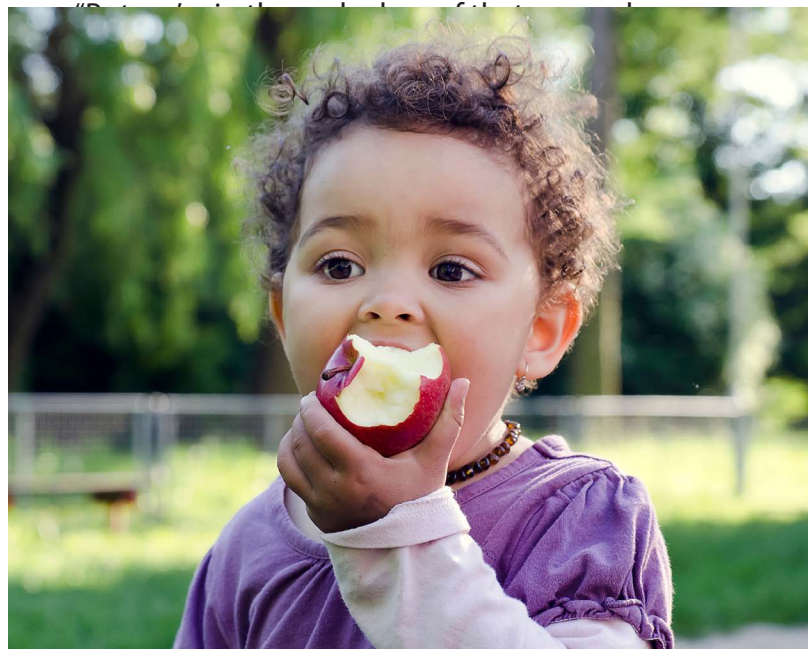
In fact, his team has already created a promising prodrug that eliminates bacteria that cause severe gum infections. And he believes this approach could one day help treat diseases outside the mouth as well.

Meanwhile, many "probiotic" and "prebiotic" supplements can already be found in grocery stores. They're often promoted for their ability to make the microbiome healthier. A prebiotic encourages the growth of certain microbes. A probiotic already contains those microbes. But researchers still don't truly know which microbes or combination of microbes are effective.

"There's really very little evidence [on specific supplements]..., so that would not be anything that I would recommend," Abnet says.

Fortunately, there are many evidence-backed ways to have a healthier oral microbiome. The habits that make for a healthy lifestyle also happen to be good for the oral microbiome. That includes good dental hygiene and a well-balanced diet.

"Maybe one day we'll have [microbiome-based treatments that are] beneficial to people," Abnet





# BenefitHub™

## Member Perks Program



Access over 302,000 local and national discounts at work, at home, or on the go! Save on thousands of hotels, restaurants, movie tickets, retailers, florists, car dealers, theme parks, national attractions, concerts, and events.



### Nearby Offers

Discover discounts in your neighborhood and 10,000 cities nationwide.



### Mobile Access

Save an app icon to your phone's home screen for quick access to discounts.



### #LifeHasPerks

Great giveaways every month! Win movie tickets, electronics, cash, and more!

All discount offers are subject to change at any time without notice. Log in regularly to view the latest discounts available.



## Paws on the Road:

Tips for a dog-  
friendly vacation

(BPT) - Whether you're seeking sandy beaches or fresh mountain air, you can make your road trip even better with a furry co-pilot.

Traveling with your pup does require some preparation. To ensure a successful and stress-free journey with your four-legged friend, check out these five helpful tips.

## 1. Safety first!

If you haven't already, invest in a pet seat belt, car seat or travel crate so your dog can travel comfortably and safely. Not only will these safety products keep your pup safe, but they also prevent your pet from distracting you while driving. Find dog seat belts and more at Chewy.com. You can also use these Chewy dog seat belts, car seats and crates for everyday trips around town after your vacation.

## 2. Pack a travel kit

Put together a travel kit with your pet's essentials. A travel kit should include items to help keep your furry companion comfortable, happy and safe while on vacation.

Besides water, food, treats, bowls and waste bags, make sure to include your dog's favorite toys, bedding and grooming supplies. Don't forget a leash and collar with ID tags just in case you get separated during your adventures.

## 3. Plan pet-friendly stops

As you choose your route, research pet-friendly stops, such as rest areas and parks that welcome pets. Plan to stop every 2-4 hours. However, you may have to stop more frequently if your pup has travel anxiety or becomes motion sick.

## 4. Prioritize exercise and playtime

Stops aren't just for meals and potty breaks. Just like you, your four-legged friend needs to stretch their legs and burn off some energy. During rest stops, take time to exercise and play with your pet.

If you stop at a park with trails, plan to go hiking. At a pet-friendly rest area, play

fetch or simply run around. Whatever physical activities you decide to do, exercise and playtime during a long road trip will keep your dog engaged and entertained. You'll get a workout, too!

## 5. Keep cool and hydrated

Depending on where you plan to travel, your destination may get even hotter than what your furry family member is used to back at home.

Keep your pup cool and hydrated by offering plenty of fresh water during rest stops. Consider purchasing a cooling mat or vest for your pet to help them stay comfortable. Most importantly, never leave your dog in a parked car on a hot day.

Are you ready to hit the road with your best friend? Follow these five tips, and you'll be well on your way to an unforgettable road trip with your dog.



# NOTICE OF ANNUAL MEETING OF MEMBERS

The Annual Meeting of the Members of On-Demand Independent Contractor Association will be held at 12645 Olive Blvd, St. Louis, MO 63141, on Wednesday, August 12, 2026 at 11:30 a.m. (CST) for election of Directors and for the transaction of such other business as may properly come before the meeting and any adjournment thereof.

The above notice is given pursuant to the By-Laws of the Association.

## PROXY

### On-Demand Independent Contractor Association

### August 12, 2026 Annual Meeting of Members

### THIS PROXY IS SOLICITED ON BEHALF OF ON-DEMAND INDEPENDENT CONTRACTOR ASSOCIATION

The undersigned member of On-Demand Independent Contractor Association does hereby constitute and appoint the President of On-Demand Independent Contractor Association, the true and lawful attorney(s) of the undersigned with full power of substitution, to appear and act as the proxy or proxies of the undersigned at the Annual Meeting of the Members of On-Demand Independent Contractor Association and at any and all adjournments thereof, and to vote for and in the name, place and stead of the undersigned, as fully as the undersigned might or could do if personally present, as set forth below:

1. FOR [    ], or to [    ] WITHHOLD AUTHORITY to vote for, the following nominees for Board of Directors:  
Kirk O'Donnell, Jay Delsing, and Thom Messmer
2. In their discretion, the proxies are authorized to vote upon such other business as may properly come before the Meeting.

This proxy, when properly executed, will be voted in the manner directed by the undersigned member. If no direction is made, this proxy will be voted for the election of directors and officers.

DATED: \_\_\_\_\_, 2026

Signature \_\_\_\_\_

Name (please print) \_\_\_\_\_

Please date and sign and return promptly to 12645 Olive Blvd, St. Louis, MO 63141 whether or not you expect to attend this meeting. The Proxy is revocable and will not affect your right to vote in person in the event that you attend the meeting.

St. Louis, Missouri

July 23, 2026

Date



*A Healthier You* is published by:  
**On-Demand Independent Contractor Association**

For information regarding your membership  
and association services, call or write:

**Membership Services Office**  
**On-Demand Independent Contractor Association**  
**12645 Olive Blvd**  
**Suite 300A**  
**St. Louis, MO 63141**

**1-800-992-8044 or (636) 530-7200**

Benefits may not be available in all membership levels.  
For more information, or to upgrade your membership, please call 1-800-992-8044