

# Listen to your microbes: a graphic story from their perspective

By Professor Fergus Shanahan<sup>1</sup> and Laura Gowers<sup>2</sup>

Blending science and art, *Listen to your microbes* explores the human microbiome from the perspective of our inner friends – our personal microbes – within the oral cavity and deep within the digestive tract. Although some oral microbes have been linked with various chronic inflammatory disorders, for most of us our personal microbes are associated with health – they protect against infection, shape the immune system and maintain metabolic health.

After decades of scientific research at APC Microbiome Ireland, University College Cork, Professor Fergus Shanahan and graphic artist Laura Gowers have collaborated to present the story of personal microbes and health in a refreshingly novel way.

This book, in a playful way, communicates complex scientific research and fundamental principles about the wonderful world of microbes and how important our relationship with these creatures is to maintain a healthy and happy life.

*Listen to your microbes* shines a light on these creatures, giving them the stage and allowing the microbes themselves to tell their story. Microbes present the information in an accessible way that combines humour with beautiful imagery and minimal text.



Professor Fergus Shanahan

Laura Gowers

Another novelty is the use of QR codes linked to online scientific information for readers seeking more detail.

According to Shanahan, the microbes in this story have one clear message: mind your microbes and they will mind you. They dislike being referred to in imprecise human terms such as ‘good’, ‘bad’ or ‘superbugs’, and are critical to many human behaviours and attitudes to health. They offer clear health messages with common sense advice regarding major public health challenges including: rising rates of obesity and chronic disease; resistance of microbes to antibiotics; drug interactions with microbes; and even climate change.

Antonie van Leeuwenhoek (1632–1723) was the first person to see his own microbes when he turned his homemade microscope on his own faeces and dental scrapings. We know from his writings that far from being repulsed by what he saw, he was enchanted. He described the microbes he saw as ‘little animalcules very prettily a-moving!’ Shanahan and Gowers were both inspired by Antonie and the images he drew, and like the great discoverer, they are intrigued and charmed by the diversity, beauty and ingenuity of these wonders of nature. They hope that the images in this book of personal microbes will feed curiosity and respect for the microbes we depend on.

This is a story for all ages, young and not so young. It’s for anyone interested in how personal microbes help protect human health.

Fergus Shanahan and Laura Gowers will officially launch their book in the UK at the Portsmouth Bookfest 2024, Saturday 2 March at 11am in Portsmouth Central Library (tickets available from <https://librariesandarchives.portsmouth.gov.uk>). Come and meet the authors!

The hardback book *Listen to your microbes: a graphic story from their perspective* by Fergus Shanahan and Laura Gowers will be available from good bookshops nationwide, and can be ordered now directly from <https://libertiespress.com/>.



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