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Gut Microbiota and Insulin Resistance: Mechanisms, Therapeutic Strategies, and Future Directions

Authors:

1. Anna Zygmunt

- affiliation: Department of Pathology and Molecular Diagnostics, Medical University of Silesia in Katowice
- ORCID: 0009-0002-5849-6347
- corresponding author: e-mail: aniazygmunt82@gmail.com

2. Mateusz Drabczyk

- affiliation: Bonifrater Medical Center Branch In Katowice, Markiefki 87,40-211 Katowice
- ORCID: 0000-0003-3354-5982

3. Karolina Karoń

- affiliation: Municipal Hospital in Zabrze
- ORCID: 0009-0005-0356-8907

4. Łukasz Karoń

- affiliation: Department of Pathology and Molecular Diagnostics, Medical University of Silesia in Katowice

- ORCID: 0009-0009-5083-8307

5. Wojciech Grabowski

- affiliation: WSB University

- ORCID: 0009-0006-9238-1411

6. Daria Pedrycz

- affiliation: Department of Family Medicine, Medical University of Białystok

- ORCID: 0009-0001-4988-5992

7. Grzegorz Drapała

- affiliation: Wojewodzki Szpital Zespolony w Kielcach

- ORCID: 0009-0008-1492-1544

8. Emilia Pedrycz

- affiliation: Wojewodzki Szpital Zespolony w Kielcach

- ORCID: 0009-0006-2751-2227

9. Sławomir Karoń

- affiliation: Wojewódzki Szpital Specjalistyczny nr 5 im. św. Barbary

- ORCID: 0009-0003-2551-4745

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Abstract

The gut microbiota, a complex ecosystem of microorganisms within the gastrointestinal tract, has emerged as a critical regulator of metabolic health. This review explores the intricate relationship between gut microbiota and insulin resistance, focusing on the underlying mechanisms, compositional changes, and therapeutic implications. Dysbiosis, characterized by reduced microbial diversity and an imbalance between beneficial and pathogenic species, contributes to insulin resistance through impaired short-chain fatty acid (SCFA) production, gut barrier dysfunction, and systemic inflammation. Key bacterial taxa, such as *Akkermansia muciniphila* and *Faecalibacterium prausnitzii*, play pivotal roles in maintaining metabolic homeostasis, while alterations in the Firmicutes-to-Bacteroidetes ratio and increased endotoxin production exacerbate metabolic dysfunction. Evidence suggests that modifiable

factors, including diet, physical activity, and microbiota-targeted therapies like probiotics, prebiotics, and fecal microbiota transplantation (FMT), offer potential avenues for restoring microbial balance and mitigating insulin resistance. Despite advancements, research in this field faces challenges, including methodological variability, interindividual microbiota differences, and a need for standardized clinical approaches. Future studies should focus on long-term, large-scale interventional trials, personalized microbiota-based interventions, and elucidation of the gut microbiota's molecular mechanisms. This review underscores the promising role of gut microbiota in managing insulin resistance and highlights opportunities for integrating microbiota-targeted strategies into clinical practice.

1. Introduction

1.1. The Significance of Gut Microbiota in the Context of Human Health

The gut microbiota, a dense and dynamic population of microorganisms, has co-evolved with humans to form a mutualistic relationship crucial for overall health. It plays a significant role in breaking down dietary fibers, producing short-chain fatty acids (SCFAs) such as butyrate, and synthesizing essential vitamins [1][5]. Beyond its metabolic functions, the microbiota is deeply involved in maintaining the integrity of the gut barrier, preventing the translocation of pathogens and harmful metabolites into systemic circulation [3][7]. Moreover, it exerts profound effects on the immune system, modulating both innate and adaptive immune responses, which helps maintain homeostasis and prevent chronic inflammation [2][6]. Dysbiosis, or an imbalance in the microbiota composition, has been implicated in the development of numerous diseases, including autoimmune, gastrointestinal, and metabolic disorders [4][5]. Thus, understanding the gut microbiota's functional diversity is essential for elucidating its role in both health and disease [1][3].

1.2. Definition and Characterization of Metabolic Diseases

Metabolic diseases represent a group of interconnected conditions characterized by abnormalities in energy utilization, storage, and distribution. These disorders include obesity, type 2 diabetes, metabolic syndrome, and non-alcoholic fatty liver disease, all of which are marked by insulin resistance, chronic low-grade inflammation, and dyslipidemia [2][4]. A hallmark of these diseases is impaired glucose metabolism, often driven by an imbalance between caloric intake and expenditure, as well as genetic and environmental factors [3][5]. Chronic inflammation plays a central role in metabolic dysregulation, with adipose tissue

macrophages contributing to systemic inflammatory cytokine production [6][7]. Notably, recent studies have highlighted the gut microbiota's involvement in modulating metabolic processes, suggesting that it may serve as both a contributor and potential therapeutic target in these conditions [1][4]. Thus, metabolic diseases represent a pressing global health challenge with multifactorial etiologies requiring comprehensive study [2][6].

1.3. Objective of the Literature Review

This literature review aims to synthesize current knowledge on the interplay between gut microbiota and metabolic diseases, focusing specifically on insulin resistance. It seeks to identify key mechanisms through which gut microbiota influences metabolic pathways and the onset of insulin resistance, including its role in glucose metabolism, inflammation, and short-chain fatty acid production [1][3][5]. By integrating findings from recent studies, the review also explores potential therapeutic interventions, such as dietary modulation, probiotics, and microbiota transplantation, as strategies to address metabolic disorders [2][6]. Ultimately, the goal is to highlight gaps in the current understanding and propose directions for future research [4][7].

2. Gut Microbiota - Fundamental Information

2.1. Definition and Composition of Gut Microbiota

Gut microbiota refers to the complex community of microorganisms, including bacteria, archaea, fungi, and viruses, that inhabit the gastrointestinal tract, particularly the colon [1][3]. These microorganisms form a dynamic ecosystem, which is influenced by various factors such as genetics, diet, age, and environmental exposures [2][6]. Bacterial taxa constitute the majority of the gut microbiota, with Firmicutes and Bacteroidetes being the dominant phyla, followed by Actinobacteria, Proteobacteria, and Verrucomicrobia [4][5]. Each individual hosts a unique microbiota profile, but certain "core" species are consistently observed across populations, contributing to essential functions [3][7]. The microbial composition exhibits significant plasticity, adapting to physiological and pathological changes within the host [6][1]. Understanding the diversity and stability of the gut microbiota is fundamental to unraveling its role in human health and disease [1][5].

2.2. Functions of Gut Microbiota in the Human Body

The gut microbiota performs essential functions critical for maintaining host homeostasis. It facilitates the fermentation of complex dietary polysaccharides into short-chain fatty acids (SCFAs), which serve as energy sources for colonic epithelial cells and regulate systemic metabolism [2][5]. Additionally, the microbiota plays a central role in synthesizing vitamins, such as biotin, folate, and vitamin K, which are vital for metabolic and physiological processes [3][7]. It also modulates the immune system, fostering the development of gut-associated lymphoid tissue (GALT) and maintaining a balanced immune response [1][6]. The microbiota supports the gut barrier by enhancing tight junction integrity and producing antimicrobial peptides that prevent pathogen colonization [4][5]. Dysbiosis, or microbial imbalance, can impair these functions, leading to a heightened risk of metabolic, inflammatory, and autoimmune diseases [2][6].

2.3. Methods for Studying Gut Microbiota

Advancements in technology have revolutionized the study of gut microbiota, enabling detailed characterization of its composition and functions. High-throughput sequencing techniques, such as 16S rRNA gene sequencing and metagenomic sequencing, are widely used to identify microbial taxa and predict functional capacities [1][3]. Metaproteomics and metabolomics further elucidate the protein expression profiles and metabolic outputs of the microbiota, providing insights into its functional dynamics [5][6]. Cultivation-based methods, although limited to specific strains, remain valuable for isolating and studying live microbes [4][7]. Recent innovations, such as single-cell genomics and spatial transcriptomics, offer unparalleled resolution in understanding host-microbiota interactions [3][6]. Each approach has its strengths and limitations, underscoring the need for integrative methods to achieve a comprehensive understanding of the gut microbiota [1][5].

3. Metabolic Diseases and Insulin Resistance

3.1. Epidemiology of Metabolic Diseases

Metabolic diseases, including obesity, type 2 diabetes (T2D), and metabolic syndrome, have reached epidemic proportions globally, affecting millions of individuals across all age groups [8][9]. The prevalence of these conditions is closely tied to rising rates of sedentary lifestyles, unhealthy dietary patterns, and increasing urbanization, particularly in low- and middle-income countries [1][9]. For example, it is estimated that over 10% of the global population

lives with diabetes, with higher prevalence observed in older adults and those with obesity [4][8]. Moreover, metabolic diseases are strongly associated with cardiovascular diseases, which remain the leading cause of morbidity and mortality worldwide [10][6]. The economic burden of metabolic diseases is substantial, requiring significant healthcare resources for treatment and management [5][9]. Addressing this growing epidemic necessitates a comprehensive understanding of its underlying mechanisms and modifiable risk factors [8][10].

3.2. Definition and Characterization of Insulin Resistance

Insulin resistance, a hallmark feature of metabolic diseases, refers to the diminished responsiveness of peripheral tissues, such as muscle, adipose, and liver, to insulin-mediated glucose uptake [2][9]. This condition leads to compensatory hyperinsulinemia, which temporarily maintains glucose homeostasis but ultimately contributes to β-cell dysfunction and hyperglycemia [3][7]. At the molecular level, insulin resistance is associated with impaired signaling in the insulin receptor pathway, inflammation, and increased lipotoxicity [10][6]. Chronic low-grade inflammation, driven by elevated levels of pro-inflammatory cytokines such as TNF-α and IL-6, further exacerbates insulin resistance by interfering with insulin signaling pathways [5][8]. Over time, insulin resistance predisposes individuals to T2D, metabolic syndrome, and cardiovascular diseases, emphasizing its critical role in the pathophysiology of metabolic disorders [9][1].

3.3. Risk Factors for the Development of Insulin Resistance

The development of insulin resistance is influenced by a combination of genetic, environmental, and lifestyle factors. A sedentary lifestyle and high-calorie diets rich in refined carbohydrates and saturated fats are primary drivers of insulin resistance [3][8]. Excess adiposity, particularly visceral fat accumulation, promotes lipotoxicity and the release of pro-inflammatory adipokines, which disrupt normal insulin signaling [9][6]. Genetic predispositions, including polymorphisms in genes involved in insulin receptor signaling, have also been identified as contributors [2][10]. Additionally, gut dysbiosis has emerged as a novel risk factor, with altered microbiota composition and reduced production of short-chain fatty acids linked to impaired glucose metabolism [1][7]. Other factors, such as chronic stress, disrupted sleep patterns, and aging, further exacerbate the risk of developing insulin resistance

[4][9]. Early identification and targeted interventions for these risk factors are crucial to mitigate the progression of metabolic diseases [10][5].

3.4. Definitions and Mechanisms of Diabetes, Obesity, and Other Metabolic Diseases

Diabetes

Type 2 diabetes (T2D), a chronic metabolic disorder, is primarily characterized by persistent hyperglycemia due to insulin resistance and impaired insulin secretion. Insulin resistance occurs when peripheral tissues, such as muscle, liver, and adipose tissue, fail to respond adequately to insulin, forcing the pancreas to produce excess insulin to compensate [2][6]. This compensatory hyperinsulinemia eventually leads to β-cell exhaustion and dysfunction, resulting in progressive hyperglycemia [8][11]. Chronic low-grade inflammation, driven by elevated levels of pro-inflammatory cytokines such as TNF-α and IL-6, further impairs insulin signaling pathways, exacerbating glucose dysregulation [5][10]. Dysregulated lipid metabolism, increased oxidative stress, and mitochondrial dysfunction also contribute to the pathogenesis of T2D, creating a complex interplay between genetic and environmental factors [12][16].

Obesity

Obesity, defined as an excessive accumulation of adipose tissue, is a multifactorial condition with significant implications for metabolic health. Visceral adiposity is particularly harmful due to its role in promoting systemic inflammation through the release of pro-inflammatory adipokines, such as leptin and resistin, and free fatty acids, which interfere with insulin signaling pathways [9][13]. Adipose tissue macrophages are major contributors to the inflammatory milieu, releasing cytokines that perpetuate insulin resistance and metabolic dysfunction [7][19]. Furthermore, obesity is associated with dysregulated hormonal signaling, including leptin resistance and impaired adiponectin secretion, which negatively affect energy balance and glucose metabolism [4][15]. The mechanisms underlying obesity's link to other metabolic disorders, such as T2D, highlight the need for integrated therapeutic approaches targeting inflammation and adipose tissue function [10][18].

Non-Alcoholic Fatty Liver Disease (NAFLD)

NAFLD encompasses a spectrum of liver disorders ranging from simple steatosis to non-alcoholic steatohepatitis (NASH), fibrosis, and cirrhosis. The condition is strongly associated with obesity and insulin resistance, which drive excessive hepatic lipid accumulation through increased de novo lipogenesis and impaired lipid oxidation [10][14]. Mitochondrial dysfunction, oxidative stress, and endoplasmic reticulum stress exacerbate liver inflammation, contributing to the progression from NAFLD to NASH [12][20]. Additionally, dysregulated adipose tissue function leads to an increased flux of free fatty acids to the liver, worsening hepatic steatosis [9][16]. The interplay of genetic predispositions, such as polymorphisms in the PNPLA3 gene, with environmental factors further complicates NAFLD pathogenesis, underscoring the complexity of this metabolic disease [15][23].

4. The Relationship Between Gut Microbiota and Insulin Resistance

4.1. Mechanisms by Which Gut Microbiota Influence Glucose Metabolism

The gut microbiota plays a pivotal role in regulating glucose metabolism by modulating several interconnected pathways. Dysbiosis, or an imbalance in the composition of gut microbiota, has been shown to impair glucose homeostasis by altering the gut barrier function and promoting systemic inflammation [1][5]. Key bacterial taxa influence the host's ability to process dietary carbohydrates by breaking down complex polysaccharides into absorbable sugars, which are then metabolized for energy [3][7]. Furthermore, the production of short-chain fatty acids (SCFAs) by beneficial microbiota contributes to maintaining insulin sensitivity by regulating gluconeogenesis and enhancing glucose uptake in peripheral tissues [6][14]. A decrease in the abundance of SCFA-producing bacteria, such as *Faecalibacterium prausnitzii*and *Roseburia*, has been associated with impaired glucose metabolism and an increased risk of insulin resistance [10][19]. Additionally, dysbiotic microbiota can influence the secretion of incretin hormones like GLP-1 and GIP, which are crucial for insulin release and glycemic control [9][12]. These mechanisms highlight the critical interplay between gut microbiota composition and glucose regulation in maintaining metabolic homeostasis [4][23].

4.2. The Role of Short-Chain Fatty Acids (SCFAs) in Metabolic Regulation

Short-chain fatty acids (SCFAs), primarily acetate, propionate, and butyrate, are key metabolites produced through microbial fermentation of dietary fibers in the colon. These molecules have diverse physiological roles, including enhancing insulin sensitivity, regulating lipid metabolism, and modulating inflammatory responses [2][16]. Butyrate, in particular, serves as an energy source for colonic epithelial cells and strengthens the intestinal barrier, reducing gut permeability and systemic inflammation [8][15]. SCFAs interact with G-protein-coupled receptors (GPCRs), such as GPR41 and GPR43, to promote the secretion of gut hormones like GLP-1 and PYY, which improve glucose homeostasis by stimulating insulin release and slowing gastric emptying [11][17]. Additionally, propionate has been shown to regulate gluconeogenesis in the liver, while acetate plays a role in cholesterol and lipid metabolism [6][13]. A reduction in SCFA production, often observed in dysbiotic microbiota, is associated with insulin resistance and increased risk of metabolic diseases [7][24]. Dietary interventions that increase fiber intake can restore SCFA production, underscoring their potential in preventing and managing metabolic dysfunction [9][20].

4.3. The Impact of Gut Microbiota on Inflammation and Its Connection to Insulin Resistance

Gut microbiota significantly influences systemic inflammation, a key driver of insulin resistance. Dysbiosis disrupts the intestinal barrier, increasing gut permeability and allowing the translocation of microbial-derived molecules, such as lipopolysaccharides (LPS), into systemic circulation [1][21]. LPS activates toll-like receptor 4 (TLR4) on immune cells, triggering the release of pro-inflammatory cytokines, including TNF-α and IL-6, which interfere with insulin receptor signaling and glucose uptake in peripheral tissues [4][18]. Additionally, dysbiotic microbiota reduces the abundance of anti-inflammatory bacterial species, such as *Akkermansia muciniphila*, further exacerbating the inflammatory state [5][26]. Chronic low-grade inflammation also impairs the function of insulin-producing β-cells in the pancreas, contributing to hyperglycemia and metabolic dysfunction [12][30]. Restoring microbiota balance through targeted therapies, such as probiotics or fecal microbiota transplantation, has been shown to reduce inflammation and improve insulin sensitivity in preclinical and clinical studies [6][22]. This connection highlights the intricate relationship between gut microbiota, inflammation, and the development of insulin resistance [3][28].

4.4. Gut Microbiota and Its Role in Diabetes, Obesity, and Other Metabolic Diseases

Diabetes

The gut microbiota has been shown to influence glucose metabolism and insulin sensitivity, playing a critical role in the development of diabetes. Dysbiosis, or an imbalance in gut microbiota, reduces the production of short-chain fatty acids (SCFAs), such as butyrate, which are essential for maintaining insulin sensitivity and regulating inflammation [1][6]. In diabetes, an increased abundance of opportunistic pathogens and a decline in beneficial species, such as Akkermansia muciniphila, contribute to gut barrier dysfunction and systemic inflammation [5][11]. Lipopolysaccharides (LPS) derived from gram-negative bacteria activate toll-like receptor 4 (TLR4) pathways, exacerbating chronic low-grade inflammation and impairing insulin signaling [7][20]. These findings suggest that microbiota-targeted interventions, including probiotics and prebiotics, may hold promise for improving glucose homeostasis [9][16].

Obesity

In obesity, gut microbiota dysbiosis enhances energy extraction from the diet through microbial fermentation of polysaccharides into absorbable short-chain fatty acids, which may contribute to excessive caloric intake and adiposity [3][8]. A characteristic shift in the Firmicutes-to-Bacteroidetes ratio is frequently observed, favoring microbial taxa associated with increased energy harvesting [10][13]. Additionally, dysbiosis promotes systemic inflammation through increased intestinal permeability, allowing translocation of microbial metabolites such as LPS into circulation [14][18]. This inflammatory cascade contributes to the activation of immune cells within adipose tissue, further exacerbating obesity-induced metabolic dysfunction [12][19]. Targeting gut microbiota composition and function offers a potential avenue for obesity management [6][22].

Non-Alcoholic Fatty Liver Disease (NAFLD)

Gut microbiota plays a pivotal role in the progression of NAFLD by influencing hepatic lipid metabolism and inflammatory responses. Alterations in microbial composition affect bile acid metabolism, which regulates lipid digestion and glucose homeostasis [9][15]. Dysbiosis in NAFLD is associated with increased production of ethanol and other microbial metabolites that exacerbate oxidative stress and liver inflammation [7][20]. Furthermore, reduced levels of SCFAs in NAFLD impair the gut-liver axis, leading to hepatic lipid accumulation and fibrosis [5][12]. Restoring a healthy microbiota profile through dietary modifications or targeted probiotics may offer therapeutic benefits for patients with NAFLD [16][23].

5. Gut Microbiota Composition and Insulin Resistance

5.1. Characteristics of Gut Microbiota in Individuals with Normal Insulin Sensitivity

In individuals with normal insulin sensitivity, the gut microbiota typically exhibits a balanced and diverse composition that supports metabolic homeostasis. The relative abundance of SCFA-producing bacteria, such as *Faecalibacterium prausnitzii* and *Roseburia*, is higher in healthy individuals, contributing to gut integrity and anti-inflammatory effects [2][5]. These bacteria produce butyrate, a critical metabolite that strengthens the intestinal barrier and reduces systemic inflammation [7][11]. Beneficial species, including *Akkermansia muciniphila*, are also more prevalent, aiding in mucin layer maintenance and promoting gut barrier function [3][16]. Furthermore, the Firmicutes-to-Bacteroidetes ratio in insulin-sensitive individuals remains within a healthy range, reflecting a balanced microbial ecosystem [9][13]. This microbiota composition promotes optimal production of gut hormones, such as GLP-1, which enhances glucose metabolism and insulin secretion [8][20]. The stability and diversity of gut microbiota in healthy individuals underscore its essential role in maintaining metabolic health and preventing insulin resistance [4][22].

5.2. Changes in Microbiota Composition in Individuals with Insulin Resistance

In contrast to those with normal insulin sensitivity, individuals with insulin resistance exhibit significant alterations in gut microbiota composition. Dysbiosis in insulin-resistant individuals is characterized by a reduction in beneficial SCFA-producing bacteria, such as *Faecalibacterium* and *Roseburia*, and an increase in opportunistic pathogens [1][6]. The Firmicutes-to-Bacteroidetes ratio is often skewed, with a higher prevalence of Firmicutes, leading to increased energy harvesting from the diet and subsequent adiposity [5][13]. Dysbiosis also compromises gut barrier integrity, promoting endotoxemia through the leakage of LPS into systemic circulation, which exacerbates chronic inflammation and impairs insulin signaling [3][18]. A decline in *Akkermansia muciniphila* and *Bifidobacterium* species further contributes to gut barrier dysfunction and metabolic disturbances [9][24]. Additionally, dysbiotic microbiota may alter bile acid metabolism, influencing glucose and lipid homeostasis, thereby perpetuating insulin resistance [8][30]. These compositional changes highlight the critical role of microbiota balance in preventing and managing insulin resistance [7][25].

5.3. Key Bacterial Species Associated with Glucose Metabolism Regulation

Specific bacterial species have been identified as key players in regulating glucose metabolism and maintaining metabolic health. *Faecalibacterium prausnitzii* and *Roseburia* are prominent SCFA producers, particularly butyrate, which enhances insulin sensitivity by reducing inflammation and improving gut barrier function [6][14]. *Akkermansia muciniphila*, a mucin-degrading bacterium, plays a crucial role in maintaining gut barrier integrity and modulating immune responses, with its abundance inversely correlated with insulin resistance and obesity [3][16]. *Bacteroides thetaiotaomicron*contributes to polysaccharide digestion, supporting balanced glucose availability and energy regulation [8][11]. Conversely, an overrepresentation of opportunistic pathogens, such as certain Proteobacteria species, has been linked to elevated LPS levels and chronic inflammation, worsening insulin resistance [1][19]. Studies have also identified *Bifidobacterium* species for their ability to modulate gut barrier function and improve glucose metabolism through enhanced SCFA production [5][23]. These findings suggest that targeting key bacterial species could provide therapeutic avenues for managing glucose metabolism and mitigating insulin resistance [7][28].

6. Factors Modifying Gut Microbiota and Their Impact on Insulin Resistance

6.1. The Role of Diet in Shaping Gut Microbiota and Its Effect on Insulin Resistance

Diet is a primary determinant of gut microbiota composition, with profound implications for metabolic health and insulin resistance. Diets rich in dietary fiber promote the growth of beneficial SCFA-producing bacteria, such as *Faecalibacterium prausnitzii* and *Roseburia*, which enhance gut barrier function and reduce systemic inflammation [2][9]. Conversely, diets high in saturated fats and refined carbohydrates are associated with reduced microbial diversity and an increase in opportunistic pathogens that promote gut dysbiosis [6][11]. Excessive intake of high-fat diets has been shown to elevate endotoxin levels, such as lipopolysaccharides (LPS), contributing to chronic inflammation and insulin resistance [7][19]. Additionally, diets lacking fiber decrease SCFA production, weakening the gut barrier and impairing glucose metabolism [8][20]. Mediterranean-style diets, characterized by a high intake of fruits, vegetables, whole grains, and unsaturated fats, are linked to improved gut microbiota composition and reduced markers of insulin resistance [10][24]. These findings underscore the critical role of dietary patterns in modulating microbiota composition and preventing metabolic disorders [5][13].

6.2. The Impact of Physical Activity on Gut Microbiota and Insulin Sensitivity

Physical activity has a significant influence on gut microbiota composition, with notable benefits for metabolic health and insulin sensitivity. Regular exercise has been associated with increased microbial diversity and the proliferation of beneficial bacterial species, including *Akkermansia muciniphila* and *Bifidobacterium*, which are crucial for gut barrier integrity and anti-inflammatory effects [3][16]. Exercise enhances SCFA production, particularly butyrate, which contributes to improved glucose metabolism and reduced systemic inflammation [4][9]. Animal studies and human trials have demonstrated that exercise reduces the abundance of pro-inflammatory bacteria, mitigating the adverse effects of gut dysbiosis on insulin resistance [6][20]. Physical activity also influences the gut-muscle axis, promoting metabolic adaptations that enhance glucose uptake and insulin sensitivity in skeletal muscles [7][18]. These benefits appear to be independent of weight loss, indicating that exercise exerts unique microbiota-modulating effects beyond energy expenditure [11][25]. Incorporating regular physical activity into lifestyle interventions could therefore support a healthier gut microbiota and metabolic profile [8][26].

6.3. The Significance of Antibiotic Therapy and Probiotics in the Context of Gut Microbiota and Metabolism

Antibiotic therapy significantly disrupts gut microbiota composition, often leading to reduced microbial diversity and the overgrowth of opportunistic pathogens. These alterations can impair gut barrier function, increase systemic inflammation, and exacerbate insulin resistance [1][14]. Prolonged or repeated antibiotic use has been linked to persistent dysbiosis, which may contribute to metabolic dysfunctions such as obesity and type 2 diabetes [5][22]. In contrast, probiotics and prebiotics have emerged as promising strategies to restore gut microbiota balance and improve metabolic outcomes [7][17]. Probiotics, such as strains of *Lactobacillus* and *Bifidobacterium*, enhance SCFA production, reduce gut permeability, and suppress inflammatory responses, thereby improving insulin sensitivity [9][28]. Prebiotics, including inulin and fructo-oligosaccharides, selectively stimulate the growth of beneficial bacteria, promoting a healthy gut microbiota and reducing metabolic dysregulation [10][29]. While these interventions have shown promise, their effects can vary based on individual microbiota profiles and require further investigation to optimize their therapeutic potential [13][30].

7. Potential Therapeutic Strategies Based on Gut Microbiota Modification

7.1. Dietary Interventions Aimed at Improving Microbiota Composition

Dietary interventions represent a cornerstone strategy for modulating gut microbiota to improve metabolic health and reduce insulin resistance. High-fiber diets, particularly those enriched with prebiotic fibers such as inulin and fructooligosaccharides, selectively promote the growth of SCFA-producing bacteria, including *Faecalibacterium prausnitzii* and *Roseburia*, which enhance insulin sensitivity [2][5]. Plant-based diets, such as the Mediterranean diet, have been shown to increase microbiota diversity and the abundance of beneficial bacteria, reducing systemic inflammation and improving glucose homeostasis [8][11]. Conversely, reducing the intake of saturated fats and refined sugars is essential, as these dietary components are associated with dysbiosis and increased endotoxin production [6][13]. Polyphenol-rich foods, including berries, green tea, and cocoa, have also demonstrated prebiotic effects by stimulating beneficial microbial populations and improving metabolic markers [9][22]. Personalized nutrition approaches, which tailor dietary interventions based on individual microbiota profiles, hold promise for optimizing therapeutic outcomes by targeting specific dysbiotic patterns [10][24]. These findings emphasize the potential of dietary modification as an accessible and effective means of restoring gut microbiota balance and mitigating metabolic dysfunction [3][19].

7.2. Probiotic and Prebiotic Supplementation and Its Relationship with Insulin Resistance

Probiotic and prebiotic supplementation has emerged as a promising therapeutic approach to modulate gut microbiota and improve insulin resistance. Probiotics, such as *Lactobacillus* and *Bifidobacterium* strains, have been shown to enhance gut barrier integrity, reduce endotoxemia, and decrease systemic inflammation, leading to improved insulin sensitivity [1][14]. These effects are mediated by increased SCFA production, particularly butyrate, which plays a pivotal role in regulating glucose metabolism and immune responses [7][15]. Prebiotics, including resistant starch and galactooligosaccharides, selectively stimulate the growth of beneficial bacteria, further supporting gut health and metabolic function [6][21]. Clinical trials have demonstrated that combined probiotic and prebiotic supplementation, referred to as synbiotics, has synergistic effects on improving glycemic control and reducing markers of insulin resistance [9][26]. However, the efficacy of these interventions can vary

depending on the specific strains, doses, and individual microbiota profiles, necessitating further research to optimize their therapeutic applications [8][29]. Despite these challenges, probiotics and prebiotics represent a non-invasive and scalable approach to managing insulin resistance and associated metabolic disorders [10][30].

7.3. Fecal Microbiota Transplantation as a Potential Treatment Method

Fecal microbiota transplantation (FMT) is a novel therapeutic strategy that involves transferring microbiota from a healthy donor to a recipient with dysbiosis, with the goal of restoring a balanced gut microbiota. FMT has demonstrated significant potential in improving metabolic outcomes by replenishing beneficial bacterial populations and reducing systemic inflammation [3][18]. In experimental studies, FMT from insulin-sensitive donors to insulin-resistant recipients has been shown to improve glucose metabolism and insulin sensitivity, underscoring its potential in treating metabolic disorders [5][20]. The mechanisms underlying these effects include enhanced SCFA production, improved gut barrier function, and modulation of bile acid metabolism, all of which contribute to better glycemic control [7][25]. While the therapeutic application of FMT in metabolic diseases is still in its early stages, preliminary clinical trials have shown promising results, particularly in improving markers of insulin resistance and reducing liver fat content in patients with NAFLD [11][28]. However, challenges such as donor selection, standardization of protocols, and long-term safety considerations must be addressed before FMT can be widely adopted in clinical practice [9][23]. This innovative approach highlights the potential of microbiota-based therapies in addressing the root causes of insulin resistance and metabolic dysfunction [6][30].

8. Challenges and Limitations in Research on Gut Microbiota and Insulin Resistance

8.1. Methodological Challenges in Gut Microbiota Research

Research on gut microbiota and its relationship with insulin resistance faces significant methodological challenges, which complicate the interpretation of findings. One primary issue is the reliance on cross-sectional studies that fail to establish causal relationships

between dysbiosis and metabolic outcomes [2][9]. Longitudinal and interventional studies are required to better understand the temporal dynamics of microbiota changes and their impact on insulin sensitivity [4][12]. Another limitation is the variability in sequencing techniques, such as 16S rRNA gene sequencing and shotgun metagenomics, which can yield inconsistent results due to differences in resolution, depth, and bioinformatic pipelines [6][13]. Additionally, sampling methods, including fecal versus mucosal microbiota analysis, may provide divergent representations of microbial composition, leading to discrepancies in data interpretation [7][18]. The lack of standardized protocols for data collection, processing, and analysis remains a critical barrier to reproducibility and comparability across studies [10][21]. Addressing these methodological challenges is essential for advancing the field and generating robust evidence on the role of microbiota in insulin resistance [11][19].

8.2. Individual Differences in Microbiota Composition and Their Impact on Research Outcomes

Interindividual variability in gut microbiota composition poses a major challenge in gut microbiota research, particularly in the context of insulin resistance. Factors such as genetics, diet, age, ethnicity, and environmental exposures significantly influence microbiota profiles, leading to high variability between individuals [3][14]. These differences can obscure the identification of consistent microbial biomarkers associated with insulin resistance or therapeutic responses [9][16]. For instance, the same dietary intervention or probiotic supplementation may yield divergent effects depending on the recipient's baseline microbiota composition [5][23]. Additionally, host-microbiota interactions are complex and bidirectional, with host metabolic and immune factors further shaping microbiota composition and function [6][22]. The heterogeneity of microbiota profiles within and across populations complicates the development of generalized therapeutic approaches, highlighting the need for personalized strategies based on individual microbiota characteristics [8][25]. These individual differences underscore the importance of considering microbiota variability when designing studies and interpreting research findings [7][30].

8.3. The Need for Standardization in Research Methodologies

The lack of standardized methodologies in gut microbiota research represents a significant limitation to progress in this field. Variability in study designs, such as differences in participant recruitment criteria, sample collection methods, and data analysis techniques,

hampers the comparability of findings across studies [1][14]. For example, the use of different sequencing platforms and databases for taxonomic classification can lead to inconsistencies in microbial identification and quantification [4][13]. Moreover, there is a lack of consensus on how to define and measure key outcomes, such as insulin resistance, which makes it challenging to integrate results from diverse studies [10][18]. Standardized protocols for fecal sample storage and transport are also critical, as microbial viability and composition can be significantly affected by handling procedures [6][17]. Developing universally accepted guidelines for gut microbiota research, including standardized analytical pipelines and reporting frameworks, is essential to ensure reproducibility and foster collaboration across research groups [8][24]. Standardization efforts will enable more reliable insights into the relationship between gut microbiota and insulin resistance, paving the way for effective microbiota-based interventions [9][28].

9. Perspectives and Directions for Future Research

9.1. Potential Microbiological Biomarkers of Insulin Resistance

Identifying microbiological biomarkers of insulin resistance holds promise for advancing early diagnosis and targeted therapies. Specific bacterial taxa, such as *Akkermansia muciniphila* and *Faecalibacterium prausnitzii*, have been consistently associated with improved gut barrier integrity and reduced inflammation, suggesting their potential as biomarkers for metabolic health [2][5]. Metabolites derived from gut microbiota, such as short-chain fatty acids (SCFAs), secondary bile acids, and microbial-derived lipopolysaccharides (LPS), also show potential as biomarkers due to their direct involvement in regulating glucose and lipid metabolism [8][13]. Advances in metagenomics and metabolomics enable the profiling of microbiota compositions and their functional capacities, which may aid in the identification of predictive markers of insulin resistance [4][12]. Furthermore, microbial gene signatures associated with metabolic pathways, such as those involved in SCFA synthesis or bile acid conversion, could serve as diagnostic tools for assessing insulin sensitivity [7][14]. Validation of these biomarkers in large, diverse cohorts is essential to ensure their reliability and clinical applicability [6][18]. These efforts could pave the way for microbiota-based diagnostic tools that complement traditional markers of metabolic health [10][20].

9.2. Personalization of Interventions Based on Microbiota Analysis

The heterogeneity of gut microbiota across individuals underscores the need for personalized approaches to microbiota-based interventions. Personalized nutrition strategies tailored to an individual's microbiota composition have shown potential for improving glycemic control and metabolic health [9][16]. For instance, individuals with low levels of SCFA-producing bacteria may benefit more from high-fiber diets, while those with reduced *Akkermansia muciniphila* might respond better to supplementation with prebiotics or targeted probiotics [3][14]. Advances in artificial intelligence and machine learning algorithms can facilitate the integration of microbiota profiles with other health data to predict individual responses to dietary and therapeutic interventions [6][22]. Precision medicine approaches could also enable the development of tailored probiotic or synbiotic formulations designed to restore specific dysbiotic patterns associated with insulin resistance [5][23]. Personalized Fecal Microbiota Transplantation (FMT) protocols, incorporating donor-matching strategies, may further enhance therapeutic efficacy [11][24]. These innovations highlight the potential for microbiota-based precision medicine to revolutionize the prevention and management of metabolic diseases [7][28].

9.3. The Need for Long-Term and Interventional Studies

Despite significant progress in understanding the relationship between gut microbiota and insulin resistance, most studies to date are cross-sectional or short-term, limiting the ability to establish causal links. Long-term studies are essential to investigate the temporal dynamics of microbiota changes and their sustained impact on metabolic health [1][4]. Interventional studies, particularly randomized controlled trials, are needed to evaluate the efficacy of microbiota-targeted therapies, such as dietary interventions, probiotics, prebiotics, and FMT, in reversing insulin resistance [6][14]. Moreover, large-scale, multicenter trials are critical to address the variability in microbiota compositions across diverse populations and to validate findings in different demographic and geographic contexts [10][19]. Incorporating longitudinal sampling and advanced multi-omics approaches, including metagenomics, transcriptomics, and metabolomics, will provide deeper insights into host-microbiota interactions over time [8][22]. Ethical considerations and regulatory frameworks must also be developed to ensure the safety and standardization of microbiota-based therapies in clinical practice [7][26]. These efforts will be pivotal in translating microbiota research into effective and scalable solutions for managing insulin resistance and metabolic disorders [9][30].

10. Summary and Conclusions

10.1. Synthesis of Key Findings from the Literature Review

This review highlights the critical role of gut microbiota in the pathophysiology of insulin resistance and metabolic diseases such as type 2 diabetes (T2D), obesity, and non-alcoholic fatty liver disease (NAFLD). Dysbiosis, characterized by reduced microbial diversity and an imbalance in beneficial and pathogenic species, contributes to metabolic dysfunction through multiple mechanisms, including impaired SCFA production, disruption of gut barrier integrity, and chronic low-grade inflammation [2][6]. Key bacterial species, such as *Akkermansia muciniphila* and *Faecalibacterium prausnitzii*, have been identified as protective, whereas elevated levels of LPS-producing gram-negative bacteria exacerbate insulin resistance [8][14]. Modifiable factors such as diet, physical activity, and microbiota-targeted therapies, including probiotics, prebiotics, and fecal microbiota transplantation (FMT), offer potential avenues for restoring microbiota balance and improving metabolic outcomes [9][15]. Despite these promising findings, significant challenges, including methodological inconsistencies and interindividual variability, complicate the translation of microbiota research into clinical practice [10][20].

10.2. Clinical and Practical Implications

Understanding the role of gut microbiota in insulin resistance provides a foundation for novel diagnostic and therapeutic strategies aimed at mitigating metabolic disorders. Microbiota-targeted interventions, such as high-fiber diets and probiotic supplementation, hold significant promise for improving glycemic control and reducing systemic inflammation [5][12]. Emerging evidence suggests that personalized approaches, tailored to individual microbiota profiles, may enhance the efficacy of these interventions, offering a pathway toward precision medicine in metabolic health [6][16]. The identification of specific microbiota-derived biomarkers, such as SCFAs and LPS, could also improve early diagnosis and monitoring of insulin resistance [4][18]. However, the implementation of these strategies requires addressing barriers such as the lack of standardized protocols, regulatory challenges, and variability in individual responses [9][24]. Integrating microbiota-based therapies into routine clinical practice will necessitate robust clinical trials and multidisciplinary collaboration to ensure safety, efficacy, and scalability [7][28].

10.3. Recommendations for Future Research

Future research should prioritize the development of standardized methodologies for microbiota analysis, including uniform sampling protocols, sequencing techniques, and data interpretation frameworks, to enhance reproducibility and comparability across studies [1][8]. Long-term, large-scale interventional studies are needed to establish causal relationships and evaluate the sustained effects of microbiota-targeted therapies on metabolic outcomes [10][22]. Personalization of interventions should be a key focus, leveraging advances in multi-omics and artificial intelligence to design individualized treatment strategies based on unique microbiota profiles [6][25]. Additionally, exploring the microbiota-gut-liver axis and its role in NAFLD and metabolic diseases offers an important avenue for advancing our understanding of microbiota-mediated mechanisms [11][26]. Ethical considerations and regulatory frameworks must also evolve to support the safe and effective implementation of innovative therapies, such as FMT, in clinical settings [9][30]. These efforts will be instrumental in translating microbiota research into actionable solutions for combating insulin resistance and its associated metabolic disorders [7][27].

Disclosure

Author's contribution: Anna Zygmunt, Mateusz Drabczyk, Łukasz Karoń, Karolina Karoń, Wojciech Grabowski, Daria Pedrycz, Grzegorz Drapała, Mateusz Drabczyk, Emilia Pedrycz, Sławomir Karoń

Conceptualisation: Łukasz Karoń, Wojciech Grabowski, Daria Pedrycz

Methodology: Anna Zygmunt, Łukasz Karoń, Mateusz Drabczyk, Karolina Karoń, Grzegorz Drapała

Software: Wojciech Grabowski, Anna Zygmunt, Emilia Pedrycz, Mateusz Drabczyk, Sławomir Karoń

Check: Anna Zygmunt, Łukasz Karoń, Karolina Karoń, Daria Pedrycz

Formal: Anna Zygmunt, Łukasz Karoń, Karolina Karoń, Grzegorz Drapała

Investigation: Łukasz Karoń, Karolina Karoń, Anna Zygmunt, Grzegorz Drapała

Resources: Wojciech Grabowski, , Mateusz Drabczyk, Karolina Karoń, Emilia Pedrycz, Daria Pedrycz, Sławomir Karoń

Data curation: Anna Zygmunt, Łukasz Karoń, Wojciech Grabowski, Karolina Karoń, Emilia Pedrycz, Daria Pedrycz

Writing-Rough Preparation: Anna Zygmunt, Mateusz Drabczyk
Writing Review and Editing: Anna Zygmunt
Visualisation: Anna Zygmunt, Wojciech Grabowski, Mateusz Drabczyk Karolina Karoń, Emilia Pedrycz, Sławomir Karoń
Supervision: Anna Zygmunt, Wojciech Grabowski, Grzegorz Drapała, Daria Pedrycz
Project Administration: Anna Zygmunt, Wojciech Grabowski, Mateusz Drabczyk, Emilia Pedrycz, Sławomir Karoń

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