FRANCUZIAK, Anna Ewelina, DEMBICKI, Piotr Mikołaj, KOZŁOWSKA, Kinga, KSIĄŻEK, Tomasz Karol, SZELIGA, Aleksandra, BOROWSKI, Maciej, DZIESZKO, Natalia, SZCZEPAŃSKI, Michał, KALINOWSKA, Weronika and KULASZA, Paulina Sara. Effect of Gastrointestinal Microbiota and Probiotics/Prebiotics in the Diet on the Development of Alzheimer's Disease – A Comprehensive Review. Quality in Sport. 2025;45:66476. eISSN 2450-3118.
https://doi.org/10.12775/QS.2025.45.66476
https://apcz.umk.pl/QS/article/view/66476

The journal has been awarded 20 points in the parametric evaluation by the Ministry of Higher Education and Science of Poland. This is according to the Annex to the announcement of the Minister of Higher Education and Science dated 05.01.2024, No. 32553. The journal has a Unique Identifier: 201398. Scientific disciplines assigned: Economics and Finance (Field of Social Sciences); Management and Quality Sciences (Field of Social Sciences).
Punkty Ministerialne z 2019 - aktualny rok 20 punktów. Załącznik do komunikatu Ministra Szkolnictwa Wyższego i Nauki z dnia 05.01.2024 Lp. 32553. Posiada Unikatowy Identyfikator Czasopisma: 201398. Przypisane dyscypliny naukowe: Ekonomia i finanse (Dziedzina nauk społecznych); Nauki o zarządzaniu i jakości (Dziedzina nauk społecznych).
The authors declare that there is no conflict of interest regarding the publication of this paper.
Received: 06.11.2025. Revised: 06.11.2025. Accepted: 06.11.2025. Published: 11.11.2025.

Effect of Gastrointestinal Microbiota and Probiotics/Prebiotics in the Diet on the Development of Alzheimer's Disease – A Comprehensive Review

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Abstract

Alzheimer's disease (AD) is a progressive neurodegenerative disorder characterized by memory loss, cognitive decline, and behavioral changes, affecting over 50 million people worldwide. Its etiology involves complex genetic and environmental factors, and recent evidence implicates the gut–brain axis in disease progression. Dysbiosis of the gastrointestinal microbiota has been linked to increased neuroinflammation and accumulation of amyloid-β (Aβ) plaques and neurofibrillary tau tangles, the hallmark pathologies of AD. Conversely, beneficial gut bacteria produce metabolites (such as short-chain fatty acids, SCFAs) that may counteract these processes. This review summarizes current knowledge on how dietary interventions (probiotics and prebiotics) modulate the gut microbiota and influence AD pathology. Studies indicate that probiotic strains (notably *Lactobacillus* and *Bifidobacterium*) and prebiotics have potential to improve cognitive function and reduce neuroinflammation in preclinical and clinical settings. However, studies vary in design and scale, and therapeutic protocols are not yet standardized. Further research is needed to establish efficacy, dosage, and safety of microbiota-targeted interventions. Modulating the gut microbiota thus represents a novel avenue for AD prevention and treatment, although conclusive clinical evidence is still emerging.

Keywords:

Alzheimer's disease, gut microbiota, probiotics, prebiotics, microbiota–gut–brain axis

1. Introduction

Alzheimer's disease (AD), named after the German psychiatrist Alois Alzheimer, is a progressive neurodegenerative disorder that leads to a gradual decline in memory, cognitive function, and behavior, ultimately impairing an individual's ability to live independently [1]. Although AD is primarily considered a cognitive disorder, nearly all affected individuals exhibit neuropsychiatric symptoms (NPS) at some point during the disease course. Studies have demonstrated that individuals with AD and mild cognitive impairment (MCI) experience a significantly higher prevalence of NPS compared to the general population. Among these symptoms, depression and apathy are particularly common in those with MCI and in the early stages of AD, while verbal and physical agitation is frequently observed across all stages. As the disease progresses, delusions, hallucinations, and aggression become increasingly prominent, with apathy remaining a persistent and prevalent symptom throughout all stages of the condition. Additionally, disruptions in circadian sleep–wake rhythms become more pronounced, exceeding changes typically associated with aging [2].

AD represents the most prevalent form of dementia [3], accounting for approximately 60–80% of all cases. Its incidence increases markedly with age, affecting around 1% of individuals aged 65–69, and rising to 30% among those over 85 years of age, leading to over 50 million cases globally [4]. This number is projected to double approximately every five years. Estimates suggest that by 2050, the global number of affected individuals may reach 152 million, with the most significant growth expected in developing countries [5]. These statistics underscore the urgent need to address AD as a growing public health crisis [5].

The etiology of AD is multifactorial, involving both genetic and environmental components. The disease exists in both sporadic and familial forms, with the latter associated with mutations in three specific genes: amyloid precursor protein (APP), presenilin 1 (PSEN1), and presenilin 2 (PSEN2) [6]. Familial forms are rare, accounting for less than 0.5% of all cases, while the vast majority are sporadic in nature. It is now widely recognized that a complex interplay between genetic predisposition and environmental influences contributes to the development of AD [7].

The hallmark pathological features of AD include the presence of amyloid plaques and neurofibrillary tangles. Amyloid plaques are extracellular accumulations of misfolded amyloid

beta (Aβ) peptides—primarily Aβ40 and Aβ42—derived from aberrant processing of APP. Neurofibrillary tangles consist predominantly of paired helical filaments formed by hyperphosphorylated tau protein, which under normal conditions is involved in the stabilization of microtubules. Several hypotheses have been proposed to elucidate the mechanisms underlying the deposition of amyloid plaques and tau pathology, with neuroinflammation being one of the central contributors.

Chronic inflammation is increasingly recognized as a key factor in the pathogenesis of AD. Neuroinflammation in the AD brain is driven not only by central stimuli, such as amyloid plaques and neurofibrillary tangles, but also by peripheral factors like endotoxins. Activated microglia and the associated inflammatory responses have been strongly linked to cognitive decline in individuals with AD [8].

Recent studies have highlighted the potential role of gut microbiota in modulating neuroinflammation and amyloid plaque deposition in AD. In particular, the administration of probiotic strains such as Lactobacillus and Bifidobacterium has been associated with reduced neuroinflammation and improved cognitive function in preclinical models of AD [35]. Furthermore, a 2024 study by Zhang et al. demonstrated that a specific probiotic blend not only reduced amyloid-beta aggregation but also modulated gut-brain signaling pathways, suggesting a therapeutic avenue for AD intervention [35].

The objective of this review is to synthesize and evaluate current evidence on the influence of the gastrointestinal microbiota and its modulation through dietary probiotics and prebiotics on the development and progression of AD. Specifically, it aims to investigate the interplay between the gut microbiota–gut–brain axis, neuroinflammatory mechanisms, and the hallmark pathological features of AD, including amyloid plaque formation and tau protein aggregation.

2. Materials and Methods

A narrative literature review was conducted using the PubMed database in February 2025. Keywords included “microbiota,” “Alzheimer’s disease,” “probiotics,” “prebiotics,” and their Boolean combinations such as “microbiota AND Alzheimer’s disease AND review” and “probiotics AND Alzheimer’s disease.” The search was limited to peer-reviewed articles published in English from 2011 onwards, with open-access full texts. Abstracts were screened for relevance, and qualifying studies were retrieved for full-text analysis.

3. Gut Microbiota

3.1. Composition and Functions of the Gut Microbiota

The gut microbiota is a complex community of microorganisms that inhabit various regions of the human body, including the skin, oral cavity, upper respiratory tract, ear canal, and vagina. Notably, approximately 90% of all microorganisms are concentrated within the small and large intestines [9]. The human gastrointestinal microbiota comprises over 100 bacterial species, primarily belonging to two dominant bacterial phylotypes: Firmicutes and Bacteroidetes. Additionally, smaller populations of Actinomyces, Fusobacterium, Proteobacteria, and Verrucomicrobia are also present [10]. Importantly, the gut microbiota is not limited to bacteria alone; fungi (such as Candida albicans), viruses, and certain protists have also been identified. Moreover, the gut microbiota includes microorganisms from the Archaea domain [9].

This microbial ecosystem exhibits substantial inter-individual variability, with only a small subset of microorganisms being common to most individuals. For instance, a European study analyzing 3,000 samples found that only 17 bacterial species were present in over 95% of samples, while most bacterial species were rare. Similarly, a cohort study involving 1,135 Dutch individuals identified 639 bacterial species, 469 (73%) of which were found in fewer than 10 participants. This variability is likely to influence the metabolic functions performed by the gut microbiota. Cohort studies further indicate that the dynamic nature of the gut ecosystem reflects complex interactions between the host and numerous factors, including lifestyle, diet, and environmental influences [10].

Recent studies have also highlighted the impact of age-related changes in gut microbiota composition, particularly noting a decline in beneficial bacterial species such as Bifidobacterium and Lactobacillus in elderly populations, which may exacerbate neuroinflammation and cognitive decline [36].

These microorganisms significantly impact the physiology and development of the host, contributing to overall health maintenance. Beneficial microorganisms, known as probiotics, are live microorganisms that confer health benefits to the host. These probiotic species regulate the pH of the gastrointestinal tract, enhancing the protective barrier against pathogens entering the body through the digestive system. Additionally, probiotic bacteria play a crucial role in synthesizing essential metabolites, thereby preventing inflammation and related diseases. The gut microbiota also produces bioactive compounds such as monoamines and amino acids,

which can travel through the lymphatic and vascular systems to the central nervous system, potentially influencing neuronal activity and behavior. Notably, these beneficial interactions occur only when the gut microbiota remains in a state of balance [7].

In a recent study, Lactobacillus was found to enhance attention, memory, and motivation through the production of short-chain fatty acids (SCFAs), serotonin, and acetylcholine. Furthermore, research conducted on Wistar rats demonstrated that Saccharomyces, which produces norepinephrine, facilitated memory formation and retrieval. Similarly, experiments involving pigs revealed that tryptophan produced by Bacillus improved cognitive function [11].

A 2025 study by Nguyen et al. demonstrated that targeted probiotic supplementation not only restored microbial diversity in aged mice but also significantly reduced amyloid-beta plaque deposition and tau protein hyperphosphorylation, suggesting a direct link between gut microbiota modulation and Alzheimer's pathology [37].

This review examines the potential impact of gut microbiota composition, dysbiosis, and associated neuroinflammatory processes on the development of Alzheimer's disease. Given the increasing prevalence of Alzheimer's disease in the global population, and the emerging evidence of a strong connection between the Microbiota–Gut–Brain Axis, understanding these relationships may hold significant implications for the prevention and treatment of Alzheimer's disease.

3.2. Microbiota–Gut–Brain Axis

The concept of a continuous, bidirectional communication system between the brain and gut dates back to ancient Greece, where philosophers such as Hippocrates, Plato, and Aristotle proposed that the brain and body are intricately connected. This early perspective contributed to the understanding that disease should be studied holistically, considering the entire organism rather than isolated organ systems alone [12].

A complex communication network exists between the gut and the central nervous system (CNS), involving the enteric nervous system (ENS), the sympathetic and parasympathetic branches of the autonomic nervous system (ANS), as well as signaling pathways mediated by chemical substances and neuroimmune systems [13].

Neuroendocrine Pathway

A primary route through which gut microbes and their metabolites communicate with the CNS involves cells of the gut endocrine system, particularly enteroendocrine cells (EECs) and enterochromaffin cells (ECCs) [14]. Specialized structures on EECs and ECCs, known as neuropods, have been identified as transmitting sensory signals from the intestinal environment to the brain. These signals are conveyed through synapse-like connections with nearby nerves, including the vagus nerve [12]. EECs are capable of sensing a range of microbial signals [15]. There are at least 12 distinct types of these cells, with several subtypes—such as A, K, and L cells—forming subgroups along the gut and containing various combinations of signaling molecules. EECs are distributed among the intestinal epithelial cells and house over 20 types of signaling molecules, which are often co-localized and released simultaneously [16]. EECs and ECCs can produce several neuropeptides, including peptide YY, neuropeptide Y (NPY), cholecystokinin, glucagon-like peptides 1 and 2, and substance P. Once secreted by EECs, these neuropeptides likely diffuse through the lamina propria—an area populated with various immune cells—before entering the bloodstream or exerting receptor-mediated effects on ENS neurons or external nerve fibers [14]. The gut microbiota produces various substances, such as monoamines, amino acids, short-chain fatty acids (SCFAs), and secondary bile acids (2BAs), which help regulate gut-brain motility, secretion, and signaling. These compounds act through free fatty acid receptors (FFARs) on epithelial cells, EECs, ECCs, immune cells, and both intrinsic and extrinsic neurons [7],[12]. Dietary fiber intake plays a critical role in regulating SCFA concentrations. When the host's diet is low in fermentable fiber, microorganisms consume mucus glycans and other alternative, less energy-efficient sources, leading to reduced fermentative activity and lower SCFA production. Beyond generating metabolites that activate CNS signaling pathways, certain gut microbes may also directly produce or assist in the production of neuroactive molecules, such as gamma-aminobutyric acid (GABA), norepinephrine, and dopamine. However, it remains uncertain whether these molecules reach the relevant receptors or achieve concentrations high enough to elicit a response in the host.[16] The short half-life of most neurotransmitters and their limited ability to cross the blood-brain barrier, however, make this unlikely [12],[16]. Serotonin (5-HT) stands out as a particularly important neurotransmitter due to its roles in neuroendocrine, endocrine, and paracrine signaling, influencing the development and long-term function of both the enteric and central nervous systems (ENS and CNS). It is increasingly recognized as a key component of the microbiota-gut-brain (MGB) axis, facilitating communication between the brain and gut. Notably, 95% of the body's 5-HT is produced by gastrointestinal enterochromaffin cells (ECCs) and gut neurons, with only 5% stored in the CNS. Recent studies have revealed that specific

spore-forming bacteria in humans and mice can elevate 5-HT levels in the colon and bloodstream. In ECCs, 5-HT synthesis is influenced by bacterial production of SCFAs and 2BAs, particularly by spore-forming Clostridiales, which enhance their stimulatory effects on ECCs with increased dietary tryptophan availability. The essential amino acid tryptophan (Trp) is crucial within the brain-gut-microbiota (BGM) axis, as it serves as the precursor to the neurotransmitter serotonin (5-HT). Serotonin's role in MGB communication is bidirectional: the autonomic nervous system can prompt ECCs to release 5-HT into the intestinal lumen, where it interacts with the gut microbiota [12],[16].

Neuronal Pathway

The neuronal pathway encompasses the enteric nervous system (ENS), vagus nerves, and spinal nerves [17]. The ENS, located within the intestine, consists of an extensive neuronal network that shares neurotransmitters with the CNS, with the vagus nerve serving as the central communication channel between the two [18]. The vagus nerve, serving as the primary bidirectional pathway between the brain and gut, has been extensively studied, particularly its afferent branch, which plays a critical role in brain-gut communication in both health and disease [12]. Evidence suggests that the vagus nerve may receive microbial signals in the form of bacterial metabolites, gut peptides, inflammatory molecules, or be modulated by microbiota-induced effects on EECs and ECCs in the intestinal epithelium [12],[16]. However, there is also evidence for direct neuronal activation by the gut microbiota. Toll-like receptors 3 and 7, which recognize viral RNA, as well as Toll-like receptors 2 and 4, which recognize peptidoglycan and lipopolysaccharide, are found in the ENS of both mice and humans. L. rhamnosus (JB-1), B. fragilis, and polysaccharide A from B. fragilis have been shown to activate enteric afferent neurons in ex vivo studies. However, it remains unclear to what extent luminal microbial antigens come into direct physical contact with neurons in vivo [16]. On one hand, the vagus nerve regulates metabolic homeostasis and feeding behaviors, such as gastrointestinal motility and secretory functions. On the other hand, the vagus nerve participates in inflammatory mechanisms that link the brain, gut, and other organs within the body [17].

Neuroimmune Gut Connection

It is important to emphasize that the gut microbiota influences the development and function of immune cells residing in the CNS, particularly microglia. The ANS and ENS axis directly interact with the immune system. The gut-associated lymphoid tissues (GALT) form the body's

largest immune organ, comprising more than 70% of the total immune system. The connection between infection and brain function is well established, particularly in the context of diseases such as syphilis and Lyme disease, which often manifest with psychiatric symptoms. Bacteria can release immune agonists, such as lipopolysaccharide (LPS) and peptidoglycans (PGN), into the circulation, from where they may reach the brain. There is evidence suggesting that probiotic microorganisms exert an immunoregulatory effect, promoting the generation of regulatory T cells (Tregs) and stimulating the synthesis and secretion of the anti-inflammatory cytokine IL-10. This is supported by studies showing that oral administration of Bifidobacterium infantis increases IL-10 expression in peripheral blood. Additionally, the feeding of commensal bacteria promotes Treg production and IL-10 synthesis [12],[14]. Recent research has shown that disruptions in the microbiota-gut-brain axis, such as those caused by dysbiosis, may contribute to the development of various psychiatric disorders, including depression, anxiety, and autism spectrum disorders. These findings highlight the importance of maintaining a balanced gut microbiota for mental health and open new therapeutic avenues for the treatment of neuropsychiatric conditions. Studies have shown that probiotic interventions, by restoring a healthy microbiota, may have beneficial effects on mood regulation and cognitive function [38].

The Role of Inflammation in Alzheimer's Disease

The brain is equipped with its own immune cells that provide protection against infection and injury. Microglia, which are macrophage-like cells residing in the brain, originate from monocyte precursors during the development of the nervous system [19]. These cells play a crucial role in modulating synapse formation and remodeling synaptic circuits. In response to infection, disease, abnormal stimuli, or the presence of neurotoxins, microglia become activated and act as mediators of inflammation. This process involves rapid alterations in the transcriptional profile, leading to the production of pro-inflammatory molecules. Depending on the nature of the inflammatory trigger, the cytokines and chemokines produced may promote the recruitment of leukocytes into the brain. Such changes enable microglia to migrate to sites of damage, where they enhance their phagocytic capacity, allowing them to engulf and digest dead or damaged neurons [20].

Astrocytes perform numerous essential functions in the brain, such as regulating blood flow, maintaining the blood-brain barrier (BBB), providing neuronal energy in the form of metabolites, modulating synaptic activity, controlling neurotrophin secretion, and removing

dead cells, among others. Astrocytes also play a key role in maintaining homeostasis in the brain's extracellular environment, by regulating ion concentrations and neurotransmitter levels [39]. Like microglia, astrocytes are divided into subpopulations with pro-inflammatory and immunoregulatory (neuroprotective) properties. Pro-inflammatory reactive astrocytes upregulate the expression of genes such as those involved in the complement cascade and produce pro-inflammatory factors, including IL-1β, TNF-α, and nitric oxide, which have detrimental effects on tissues. In contrast, neuroprotective astrocytes promote the secretion of neurotrophic factors and thrombospondin. Anti-inflammatory cytokines, such as IL-4, IL-13, and IL-10, can activate astrocytes in a neuroprotective manner, stimulating them to secrete IL-4, IL-10, and TGF-β, thereby helping to protect neural tissue and promote regeneration [21].

The term "neuroinflammation" refers to a process in which neurons release substances that sustain inflammation and immune responses. These immune responses can have both beneficial and detrimental effects on the brain, depending on the extent of their activation [19]. When the inflammatory response is mild and controlled, it can promote brain protection, for instance, by removing pathogens or repairing damaged tissues. However, if inflammation becomes over-activated or chronic, it can result in brain cell damage, leading to neuronal degeneration. Moreover, prolonged activation of neuroinflammatory pathways can lead to the formation of chronic gliosis, a process characterized by the hypertrophy and proliferation of glial cells, which exacerbates tissue damage [40]. An excessively intense inflammatory response may lead to the release of toxic substances such as pro-inflammatory cytokines, reactive oxygen species, and nitric oxide, which contribute to oxidative stress and neuronal damage [22]. Prolonged neuroinflammation has been implicated as both a cause and a consequence of several neurodegenerative diseases, including Alzheimer's disease [7]. Neuroinflammation is considered a key factor in disease progression, potentially contributing to its development through the activation of microglia and other immune system components in the brain. This phenomenon is associated with an inflammatory response triggered by amyloid-β (Aβ) deposition, which results in neuronal damage, synaptic dysfunction, and further progression of the disease. Studies suggest that chronic inflammation in the brain may play a significant role in neurodegeneration and the clinical manifestations of Alzheimer's disease (AD), such as memory and cognitive impairment [7], [22], [19]. Furthermore, the link between the gut microbiota and Alzheimer's disease has been proposed due to the role of inflammation in the pathology of this condition [7]. Recent research also suggests that alterations in the blood-brain

barrier (BBB) permeability contribute to the exacerbation of neuroinflammation, as inflammatory mediators can infiltrate the brain more easily [41].

Pro-inflammatory cytokines play a pivotal role in neuroinflammation. In particular, elevated serum levels of cytokines such as IL-1, IL-4, IL-6, IL-1β, IL-1α, IL-9, IL-17, IL-15, IL-16, IL-12, IL-18, TNF-α, TGF-β, and pro-inflammatory factors like iNOS, which are central to nervous system inflammation, have been observed in AD patients. Interleukins, secreted by leukocytes and activated microglia, are critical to the immune response. They promote the activation of T-lymphocyte-dependent cytotoxicity and stimulate the increased activity of macrophages and neutrophils [22]. The sustained release of cytokines by microglia and astrocytes appears to be a consequence of the persistent deposition of Aβ peptides in the extracellular space [7],[11]. While IL-4 is primarily associated with anti-inflammatory responses, it may have adverse effects in the context of Alzheimer's disease under certain circumstances. This cytokine impedes the efficiency of Aβ clearance, the process of removing Aβ from the brain. As a result, it exacerbates Aβ deposition, promoting the formation of amyloid plaques—one of the key pathological features of Alzheimer's disease [22].

A key element in the pathogenesis of Alzheimer's disease (AD) is the activation of microglia in response to Aβ deposition [7]. Recent studies suggest that the pathological process of amyloid begins with the dysfunction of APPβ-secretase and γ-secretase, leading to the formation of insoluble Aβ fibrils. Aβ oligomerizes, penetrates synaptic gaps, and disrupts synaptic signaling. Subsequently, it polymerizes into insoluble amyloid fibrils, which aggregate into plaques. This polymerization activates kinases, which can enhance the hyperphosphorylation of the microtubule-associated protein tau, leading to the formation of neurofibrillary tangles (NFTs) [11]. It is now understood that disturbances in Aβ homeostasis precede changes in other proteins and cells, which together shape the cognitive phenotype of Alzheimer's disease. The identification of genes encoding proteins associated with the innate immune response, such as complement receptor 1, CD33, and TREM2, underscores their critical role in the microglial response to Aβ accumulation. Growing evidence suggests that neuroinflammatory processes may be a cause rather than a consequence of neurodegeneration in AD. However, it remains uncertain whether inflammation is the primary event in disease progression, as many studies indicate that Aβ deposition may precede the microglial response. The dual role of microglia in Alzheimer's disease is also noteworthy, as these cells can exhibit both neurotoxic and neuroprotective functions depending on their activation state [42]. Contemporary hypotheses propose a vicious cycle between Aβ accumulation and microglia activation in the brains of AD

patients. Microglia-induced neuroinflammatory processes are considered a promising therapeutic target for the treatment of the disease. In this context, it has also been hypothesized that dysbiosis of the gut microbiota may contribute to the promotion of neuroinflammatory processes in Alzheimer's disease [7]. Ongoing research is exploring the potential of targeting specific immune pathways, such as the inhibition of microglial activation or the modulation of gut-brain interactions, as promising therapeutic strategies for mitigating neuroinflammation and slowing disease progression [43].

3.3. Bacteria and Neuroinflammation in Alzheimer's Disease

Recent studies in both mice and humans suggest that viral or bacterial infections, particularly disorders of the gut microbiota, may contribute to the development of Alzheimer's disease [7]. This concept has gained significant attention in recent years, with emerging evidence showing that the gut-brain axis plays a pivotal role in neuroinflammation and neurodegenerative diseases [44]. Hypotheses concerning the involvement of gut microbiota in the neuropathology of Alzheimer's disease are primarily based on experimental findings. When infectious microorganisms cross the blood-brain barrier, they may induce neuronal death by triggering an inflammatory response, leading to the onset of AD-like symptoms. Lipopolysaccharide [LPS], a component of the outer membrane of Gram-negative bacteria, plays a significant role in this process [24]. Experimental studies in animal models have shown that the injection of bacterial LPS into the fourth ventricle of the brain induces a range of inflammatory and pathological changes characteristic of Alzheimer's disease. Furthermore, the administration of LPS into the peritoneal cavity of mice results in a long-term increase in amyloid beta [Aβ] levels in the hippocampus, subsequently leading to cognitive decline [24]. LPS has been detected not only in the hippocampus but also in the neocortex of the superior temporal lobe and cerebral cortex, with the greatest accumulation in perinuclear areas [11]. Interestingly, LPS levels were found to be slightly higher in AD patients than in healthy individuals. It was also noted that LPS colocalizes with Aβ1-40/42 both in amyloid plaques and around blood vessels. Bacterial LPS can initiate a potent immune response by interacting with the CD14 receptor and the TLR4-MD-2 complex on microglial cells. The TLR4 receptor can, in turn, bind to TIRAP and MyD88, leading to the activation of the transcription factor NF-κB, which induces the secretion of pro-inflammatory cytokines. The activation of TLR4 by CD14 also mediates the inflammatory response to Aβ and S100A8/A9 proteins. Additionally, the TLR2 receptor, activated by LPS, is also stimulated by amyloid Aβ and amyloids of bacterial origin [24]. This complex interaction of bacterial components with the host's immune system contributes significantly to the

inflammatory cascade observed in AD.[45] This process is known to trigger pathogenic pathways in AD [25].

Notably, Marizzoni and colleagues demonstrated that the normalized amyloid uptake rate positively correlated with blood LPS levels, the presence of pro-inflammatory cytokines, and endothelial dysfunction [7], [25]. An example of the influence of bacteria on the formation of AD lesions can be seen in a number of studies conducted on mice. Studies on germ-free animals have provided evidence that the intestinal microbiota can significantly affect the development of Alzheimer's disease [26]. Reduced amyloid accumulation and neurotoxicity were observed in these microbiota-free animals, suggesting that the presence of gut microbiota may contribute to these pathological processes. When these animals were re-exposed to the gut microbiota of control mice, pathological effects such as amyloid accumulation reappeared. Moreover, some gut bacteria, including Enterobacteriaceae species and fungi, can produce amyloid peptides that contribute to the seeding of amyloid aggregation in the brain. Microbial amyloids accelerate the aggregation of β-amyloid peptides and trigger an inflammatory response [24]. Studies in APP/PS1 transgenic mice, which are commonly used to model Alzheimer's disease, have shown that the absence of gut microbiota leads to reduced amyloid accumulation, underscoring the impact of the microbiota on the disease's development [26]. An interesting aspect of these studies is the change in gut microbiota composition in APP/PS1 transgenic mouse models [27]. Studies have shown that the family bacteria Prevotella and Helicobacter differ significantly between transgenic and control mice, while other bacteria, such as Actinobacteria and the TM7 cluster, may serve as more precise biomarkers for AD [26], [27]. Changes in microbiota composition at different stages of disease have also highlighted the potential for targeted microbiome-based interventions to alter the course of AD progression [46]. Alterations in microbiota diversity, along with changes in circulating metabolites involved in inflammatory pathways and the metabolism of nucleotides, lipids, and sugars, have been observed, suggesting that gut microbiota may have a broad impact on AD pathogenesis.

Notably, studies comparing the microbiota of APP/PS1 mice at different stages of the disease with matched controls have revealed significant changes in the abundance of bacterial families such as Proteobacteriaceae, Verrucomicrobiaceae, Bifidobacteriaceae, Erysipelotrichaceae, Prevotellaceae, Bacteroidaceae, and Rikenellaceae [26], [27]. These changes were detected well before amyloid deposits were observed in the brain, indicating that gut microbiota could potentially serve as an early diagnostic marker for the disease.

Although mice are a commonly used animal model in Alzheimer's disease research, some studies in Drosophila melanogaster suggest a potential role for Wolbachia bacteria as a biomarker for Alzheimer's disease [7]. The use of alternative animal models like Drosophila is expanding the scope of microbiome research, enabling insights into the genetic underpinnings of microbial interactions in AD [45]. The bacterium Stenotrophomonas appears to have a protective effect against neurodegeneration, opening new avenues for research into the gut microbiome as a protective factor against neurodegenerative diseases. In conclusion, the gut microbiota holds potential not only in the pathogenesis of Alzheimer's disease but also in its early diagnosis, underscoring the need for further research into the relationship between the microbiota and neurodegenerative diseases.

Studies comparing the microbiota of AD patients with healthy individuals have revealed reduced microbial diversity in AD patients, as well as a decrease in Firmicutes and an increase in Bacteroidetes [26]. Other studies have also confirmed alterations in the gut microbiota of dementia patients, including a decrease in Bacteroides and changes in the numbers of Firmicutes and Proteobacteria [27]. The imbalance between beneficial and pathogenic microbes further complicates AD progression by amplifying systemic inflammation [45].

Additionally, chronic infections like H. pylori may exacerbate existing neuroinflammatory pathways, accelerating AD pathology [27].

4. Role of Probiotics in Alzheimer’s Disease

Probiotics are supplements containing live microorganisms that can modulate the composition of the gut microbiota, thereby promoting gut-brain axis balance and potentially reducing neuroinflammation by lowering inflammatory and oxidative biomarkers [26],[28],[31]. Moreover, these microorganisms can enhance the production of neuroprotective metabolites, such as short-chain fatty acids (SCFAs), which have been implicated in the regulation of neuroinflammation and cognitive function [47]. Evidence from clinical trials and meta-analyses of randomized controlled trials indicates that modifying the microbiota with probiotics may influence cognitive function, including memory and learning, and mitigate cognitive decline associated with Alzheimer’s disease (AD) [31],[32],[33]. Among the most extensively studied probiotic strains are Lactobacillus and Bifidobacterium [31],[32].

A landmark double-blind, placebo-controlled study on AD patients demonstrated that supplementation with strains of Lactobacillus acidophilus, Lactobacillus casei, Bifidobacterium

bifidum, and Lactobacillus fermentum significantly improved Mini-Mental State Examination (MMSE) test scores. Additionally, reductions in high-sensitivity C-reactive protein, malondialdehyde, insulin resistance, and serum triglycerides were observed in the probiotic group compared to controls [33]. These findings suggest that probiotic supplementation may not only mitigate systemic inflammation but also positively impact metabolic parameters linked to cognitive decline [47].

In another study, consumption of Bifidobacterium breve, Bifidobacterium longum, and Bifidobacterium infantis for eight weeks not only altered the gut microbiota composition but also increased serum and brain levels of short-chain fatty acids (SCFAs), such as acetate and lactate. Notably, no significant changes were observed in markers of Aβ proliferation or glial fibrillary acid protein [32]. Furthermore, combining probiotics with vitamins was shown to reduce Aβ levels and improve cognitive function in transgenic mouse models. Gene profiling revealed that Bifidobacterium breve A1 consumption suppressed inflammation in the hippocampus and downregulated amyloid-activated immunoreactive genes [26].

Similarly, administration of Bifidobacterium lactis Probio-M8 for 45 days was associated with a reduction in Aβ plaque burden, modulation of gut microbiota composition, and enhanced cognitive abilities [32]. A recent Austrian study suggested that probiotic supplementation may benefit cognitive function and mood. Healthy students who consumed a multi-strain probiotic during an exam period performed better in recognition tasks (85% versus 70%) and reported higher satisfaction levels. MRI scans revealed increased blood flow to brain regions associated with memory, attention, and motor functions in the probiotic group [33].

Additionally, specific strains such as Lactobacillus johnsonii and Bifidobacterium infantis exhibited anti-inflammatory effects by modulating the kynurenine pathway, while Lactobacillus plantarum C29 upregulated microglial activation, inhibited nuclear factor kappa B (NF-κB), and reduced Aβ deposition in the brains of 5xFAD transgenic mice [25]. These results indicate that specific probiotic strains may exert neuroprotective effects through multiple mechanisms, including modulation of neuroinflammation, oxidative stress, and protein aggregation [47].

Animal studies further corroborate the neuroprotective potential of probiotics. The SLAB51 mixture, consisting of Streptococcus thermophilus, Bifidobacterium spp., and Lactobacillus spp., was shown to restore gut microbial balance, decrease plasma inflammatory cytokines, enhance ubiquitin-proteasome system function, improve autophagy, reduce Aβ deposition, and

mitigate cortical atrophy in AD mice models, ultimately leading to improved cognitive performance [23],[25],[26]. Moreover, these findings highlight the role of probiotics in modulating both central and peripheral immune responses, suggesting a potential therapeutic strategy for slowing AD progression [48].

SCFAs (short-chain fatty acids), key products of carbohydrate fermentation by gut microbiota, play a crucial role in gut-brain communication. These acids, including butyrate, acetate, and propionate, exert multiple physiological functions, such as maintaining immune homeostasis at mucosal and systemic levels [26],[28]. SCFAs are carboxylic acids with fewer than six carbon atoms and include acetic acid (CH_3COOH), propionic acid (CH_3CH_2COOH), and butyric acid ($CH_3CH_2CH_2COOH$) [28].

Butyrate, in particular, acts as a histone deacetylase inhibitor, suppressing pro-inflammatory cytokine gene expression, enhancing intestinal barrier integrity, and promoting regulatory T-cell formation [27]. Propionate interacts with γδ T-cell subsets to decrease interleukin-17 (IL-17) production in humans and mice, potentially relevant for inflammatory bowel disease treatment [27]. Furthermore, butyrate has been shown to enhance neurogenesis in the hippocampus, a region critically affected in AD, thereby contributing to cognitive resilience. [49]

SCFAs also serve as signaling molecules in the gut-brain axis, activating FXR and GPBAR1 receptors, which are expressed in intestinal macrophages, dendritic cells, and T cells. This receptor activation facilitates immune modulation and neuroprotection [34]. Furthermore, SCFAs may function as alternative energy substrates in Alzheimer's disease-related metabolic disturbances, providing an additional mechanism by which probiotics exert neuroprotective effects [26].

Collectively, these findings underscore the multifaceted therapeutic potential of probiotics in Alzheimer's disease, encompassing not only modulation of gut microbiota and reduction of neuroinflammation but also enhancement of neurogenesis, metabolic regulation, and immune modulation, thereby presenting a promising adjunctive strategy in AD management [50].

5. Role of Prebiotics in Alzheimer's Disease

Prebiotics, though variously defined, are generally considered to be dietary carbohydrates that are selectively fermented by the gut microbiota, thereby conferring health benefits to the host

[32]. These substances reach the large intestine, where they are metabolized by saccharolytic microorganisms, such as beneficial bacteria from the genus Bifidobacterium. The products of this fermentation include short-chain fatty acids (SCFAs), such as butyrate, which play a pivotal role in gut-brain axis communication and serve numerous functions that support host health. [26], [28]

Prebiotics exert their effects through their selective fermentation by gut microbiota, leading to the production of bioactive metabolites like short-chain fatty acids (SCFAs). These SCFAs, especially butyrate, have been shown to cross the blood-brain barrier and interact with receptors in the brain, such as G-protein-coupled receptors (GPCRs), which play crucial roles in neuroinflammation and neuroprotection. Moreover, SCFAs can modulate the expression of genes involved in cognitive function, neuroplasticity, and neuronal survival [51].

Studies conducted in animal models have confirmed the beneficial effects of prebiotics on psychophysical health. For instance, an experiment involving rats given B-GOS (galactooligosaccharides), FOS (fructooligosaccharides), or a placebo revealed changes in receptors responsible for synaptic plasticity and memory. Prebiotic supplementation led to an increase in the expression of brain-derived neurotrophic factor (BDNF) and N-methyl-D-aspartate receptor (NMDAR) genes in the hippocampus and dentate gyrus. In newborn rats, B-GOS supplementation also resulted in a sustained increase in the expression of these genes, which remained detectable 26 days after the conclusion of administration. Similar effects were observed with the human milk oligosaccharide 20-fucosyllactose, where BDNF expression in the cortex was elevated, and long-term synaptic potential was improved in both mouse and rat models [27].

Another study by Liu and colleagues (2021) examined the effects of the prebiotic oligosaccharide mannan administered to 5XFAD Alzheimer's disease model mice. The researchers observed reductions in cognitive deficits, amyloid plaques, oxidative stress, microglial activation, as well as beneficial alterations in the gut microbiome [32]. The prebiotic sodium oligomannan (GV-971) has been shown to improve cognitive function and is used to treat mild to moderate Alzheimer's disease. Evidence indicates that GV-971 can reverse cognitive impairment, repair intestinal dysbiosis, suppress neuroinflammation, and cross the blood-brain barrier, where it binds to amyloid-beta (Aβ) and inhibits the formation of amyloid fibrils [32].

Butyrate, in particular, is a potent histone deacetylase (HDAC) inhibitor, which regulates gene expression by promoting acetylation of histones and thereby influencing the expression of neurotrophic factors, such as BDNF. By enhancing neuronal survival and synaptic plasticity, butyrate contributes to cognitive resilience. In addition to its role in the brain, butyrate also supports gut health by reinforcing the intestinal barrier, thereby preventing systemic inflammation that could contribute to neurodegeneration [52].

Other prebiotics, such as tryptophan-related dipeptides and novel lactopeptides found in fermented dairy products, have been shown to inhibit microglial activation, resulting in improved cognitive and memory functions. Epidemiological studies involving a sample of 1,056 individuals have demonstrated that cheese consumption is associated with a reduced risk of cognitive impairment. Similarly, a 15-year follow-up study of 1,006 Japanese individuals aged 60–80 revealed that high consumption of milk and dairy products significantly reduces the risk of dementia [26].

Moreover, prebiotics may have synergistic effects when combined with other neuroprotective agents, such as antioxidants, anti-inflammatory compounds, or vitamins. Studies exploring the combination of prebiotics with compounds like curcumin, omega-3 fatty acids, and vitamins D and E have shown enhanced neuroprotective effects, including reduced amyloid burden and improved cognitive function. This suggests that prebiotics could be a valuable adjunct to current therapeutic approaches in Alzheimer's Disease [53].

Although the majority of studies thus far have focused on short-term interventions, emerging evidence suggests that long-term consumption of prebiotics may provide sustained benefits in terms of cognitive health. Ongoing clinical trials are investigating the role of prebiotics in slowing the progression of Alzheimer's Disease (AD) by continuously modulating the gut microbiota to reduce neuroinflammation and amyloid deposition. Furthermore, the cumulative effects of prebiotics on systemic health, including metabolic regulation, may offer an adjunctive approach to traditional AD therapies [51].

Prebiotics also have an immunomodulatory role in maintaining a balanced gut immune system, which plays a critical part in the neuroinflammatory response. Dysbiosis of the gut microbiota has been associated with systemic inflammation, which can lead to an overactive immune response in the brain. Prebiotic supplementation helps maintain the integrity of the gut

microbiota, thereby supporting immune homeostasis and preventing excessive activation of microglia, which is a hallmark of neurodegeneration in AD [54].

6. Discussion

Current treatments for Alzheimer's disease (AD) remain limited, largely due to an incomplete understanding of its underlying pathogenic mechanisms. The pathogenesis of β-amyloid peptide (Aβ) has been repeatedly questioned, as numerous attempts to target Aβ-related pathways with pharmacological interventions have proven unsuccessful. This underscores the complexity of AD pathogenesis and highlights the potential involvement of other contributing factors, such as the gut microbiota (GM).

Emerging evidence suggests a significant link between GM dysbiosis and AD-specific biomarkers, indicating that modulating the GM through probiotic interventions may represent a novel therapeutic strategy. For instance, specific probiotic strains, such as Lactobacillus and Bifidobacterium, have been shown to reduce Aβ deposition and neuroinflammation while enhancing cognitive function in animal models and clinical trials [55],[56]. However, to date, no probiotic formulation has received approval from major regulatory bodies as a therapeutic modality for AD. This is primarily due to the insufficient clinical evidence supporting both the efficacy and safety of probiotics in this context.

It is also important to consider the potential risks associated with probiotic supplementation. Adverse effects, such as sepsis, have been reported, particularly among high-risk populations, including elderly individuals, critically ill patients, and those with compromised immune systems. Additionally, the potential interactions between probiotics and existing pharmacological treatments for AD remain poorly understood and warrant further investigation.

Moreover, integrating prebiotic compounds that selectively promote the growth of beneficial gut bacteria could further enhance the therapeutic potential of probiotics, as demonstrated in studies utilizing B-GOS, FOS, and other oligosaccharides to modulate neuroinflammatory pathways and cognitive function. [57],[58]

Interestingly, combining probiotics with neuroprotective agents, such as curcumin or omega-3 fatty acids, has shown synergistic effects in reducing amyloid burden and mitigating oxidative stress, suggesting a multifactorial approach may be more effective in targeting AD pathology. [59],[60]

Given the promising preclinical findings, there is an urgent need for well-designed, large-scale clinical trials to validate the efficacy of probiotic and prebiotic interventions in AD patients. Such studies should not only assess cognitive outcomes but also explore potential biomarkers of gut-brain axis modulation, including SCFA levels, inflammatory cytokines, and gut microbiota composition. Moreover, the identification of specific probiotic strains and optimal dosages will be critical in developing targeted, evidence-based therapeutic protocols. Addressing these gaps in the literature could pave the way for the integration of microbiota-targeted therapies as a complementary approach in the clinical management of Alzheimer's disease [61].

Despite promising results regarding the use of probiotics and prebiotics in modulating neuroinflammation and cognitive decline in Alzheimer's disease (AD), several important limitations must be acknowledged. Many of the available studies involve small sample sizes and short intervention periods, which limit the ability to draw definitive long-term conclusions. In addition, the placebo effect may influence reported improvements in cognitive function, particularly in studies lacking strict blinding procedures or objective outcome measures.

Another important consideration is the significant variability in gut microbiota composition between individuals. Factors such as genetics, dietary habits, geographical background, and age can influence microbial diversity and responsiveness to interventions. This variability poses challenges for ensuring consistent outcomes across different populations. Furthermore, there is still no clear consensus regarding the optimal dosage, duration, and specific microbial strains that should be used in therapeutic applications.

Moving forward, future research should prioritize large-scale, long-term clinical trials with well-defined methodologies and stratified participant groups. Such studies are essential to better understand the effectiveness and reliability of microbiota-targeted strategies in the management and prevention of Alzheimer's disease.

7. Conclusion

Emerging evidence underscores the significant role of the intestinal microbiota in the pathogenesis of Alzheimer's disease (AD), influencing neuroinflammatory pathways, amyloid-beta processing, and gut–brain signaling [62], [63]. Various experimental studies have demonstrated that alterations in gut microbial composition can modulate systemic immunity

and affect neuroinflammatory cascades relevant to AD [64], [65] These findings collectively suggest that gut microbiota alterations may contribute significantly to AD progression.

Notably, recent research indicates that probiotic and prebiotic interventions may ameliorate neuroinflammatory processes in AD. Several animal studies report that supplementation with specific probiotic strains or prebiotic fibers leads to reduced microglial activation, lowered proinflammatory cytokines, and improved synaptic function [66], [67] Human clinical trials, albeit limited and heterogeneous, have observed modest improvements in cognitive performance and reductions in inflammatory markers after probiotic or prebiotic administration [68], [69]. Nevertheless, large-scale randomized trials are needed to confirm efficacy and determine optimal strains, dosages, and intervention durations.

Translating these findings to clinical application faces significant barriers. Human microbiome research is complicated by interindividual variability, dietary and lifestyle differences, and challenges in defining healthy versus disease-associated microbial profiles [70], [71]. Standardization of probiotic formulations and prebiotic regimens is lacking, which hinders reproducibility across studies. Moreover, the complex bidirectional gut–brain signaling implies that the mechanisms underlying gut-derived effects on neuroinflammation are still incompletely understood, complicating translational efforts. These challenges underscore the need for rigorous experimental designs and cross-disciplinary approaches to overcome translational hurdles.

Looking forward, the gut microbiome represents a promising avenue for AD therapeutics. By targeting gut-originated inflammation and metabolic dysfunction, future interventions may complement existing treatments and contribute to personalized prevention strategies [72], [73]. Emerging approaches such as fecal microbiota transplantation, synbiotics, and precision probiotics hold particular promise for modulating disease trajectories[74], [75] Ultimately, however, a comprehensive understanding of gut–brain interactions and robust clinical evidence will be essential to translate these insights into improved patient outcomes.

In conclusion, the interplay between the gut microbiota and AD pathology provides a compelling framework for novel therapeutic strategies, but realizing this potential will require concerted research efforts and carefully designed clinical studies.

8. Disclosure:

The authors declare no conflict of interest in relation to this study

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All authors have read and approved the final version of the manuscript.

10. Funding Statement:

The study did not receive any external funding or financial support.

11. Institutional Review Board Statement:

This study did not involve human participants or animal subjects; therefore, approval from an Institutional Review Board (IRB) was not applicable.

12.Informed Consent Statement:

Informed consent was not required for this study, as it did not involve human participants.

13. Conflict of Interest Statement:

The authors declare no conflicts of interest in relation to this study.

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