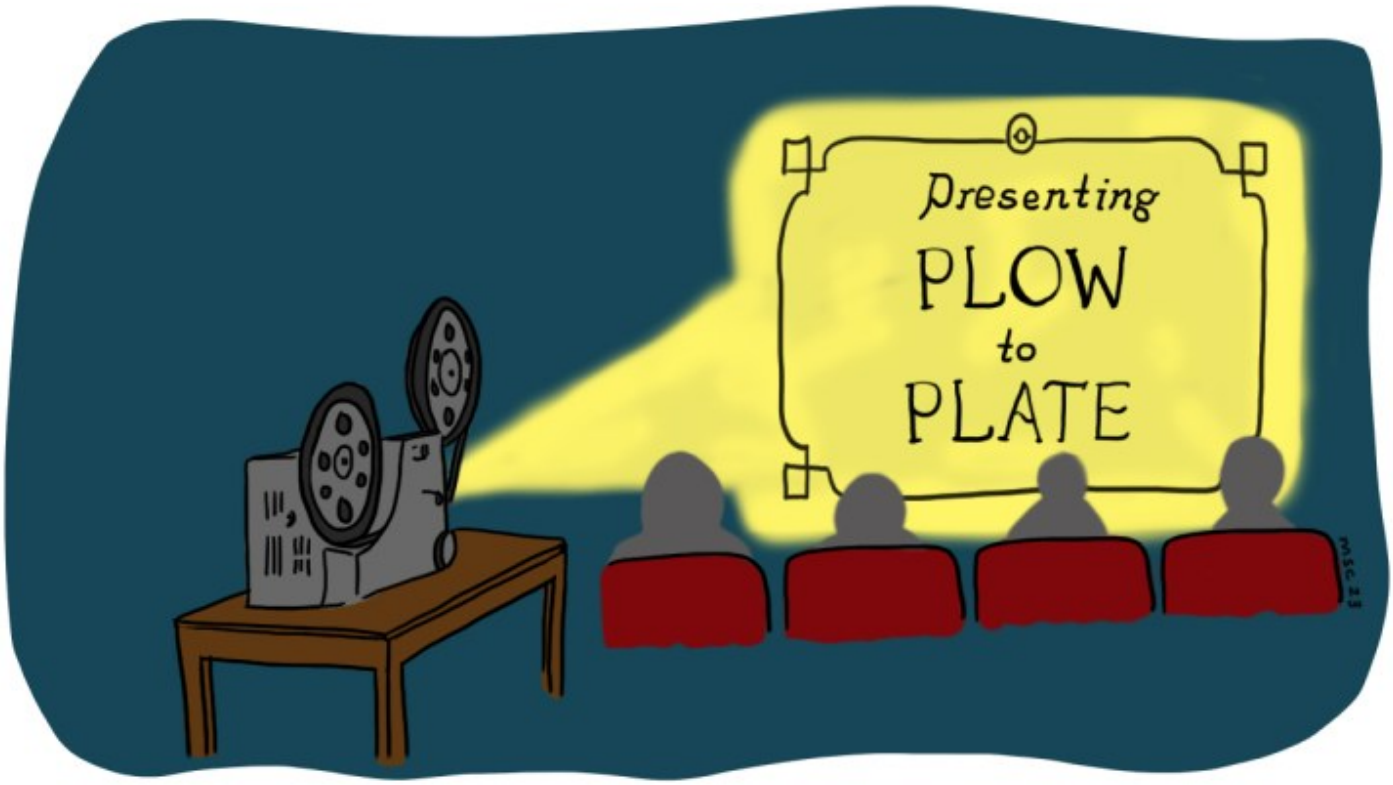
PLOW TO PLATE PRESENTS: LET THEM EAT DIRT: THE HUNT FOR OUR KIDS' MISSING MICROBES

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By Adam Rabiner

Bacteria are everywheremaand have been here long before we were. They built this world; we are reliant on them. They outnumber the stars in the galaxy and the cells in our body. The microbiome, numbering 35–40 trillion bacteria cells, mostly in our intestines, emit chemicals and fight pathogens. They are referred to as "another organ," and are now recognized as beneficial, boosting the immune system and warding off autoimmune diseases such as food allergies, diabetes, intestinal disorders and infections. Thousands of beneficial and symbiotic species of bacteria, protozoa, viruses and fungi help with digestion, processing vitamin K, brain development, blood coagulation and other bodily functions. While humans are genetically 99 percent alike based on our DNA, the individual makeup of our microbiomes sets us apart and makes us unique.



Although only a small handful of microbes are pathogens responsible for disease, there remains a lingering prejudice against germs. *Let Them Eat Dirt* argues that in attempting to vanquish the harmful bugs, we have also eliminated many beneficial ones. As a result, our grandparents had better microbiomes than we do. The film lays out in a systemic way the suspected causes of our weakened microbiomes and suggests ways to reverse the harm.

The first and most important suspect is the American lifestyle of cleanliness and hygiene. The American preoccupation with hand sanitizers, antimicrobial cleaning products, air purifiers and other products has left us over-sensitized compared to much of the rest of the world. The film contrasts us with Ecuadorian kids who walk around barefoot, exposed to animals like goats, cows, pigs and chickens. These children are less susceptible to diarrhea, even though they're exposed to intestinal parasites. They are largely healthy despite their income disadvantages. Similarly, children who grow up on American farms have less asthma than those who live in the cities because their microbiomes are more likely to have four specific beneficial bacteria, according to the view of some experts.

Another suspect is C-sections. These procedures bypass the largest transfer of vaginal and fecal microbes from mother to child in the crucial first hundred days. Studies have shown that children born by C-section are at greater risk for obesity, allergies and asthma. A third suspect is the overuse of antibiotics. These powerful drugs can damage the human immune system because they kill the good with the bad. Eighty percent of antibiotics are fed to livestock, and they are overprescribed, with one study finding that 30–50 percent of all prescriptions are inappropriate.

A fourth culprit is diet. Breastfeeding is of great value in building up babies' microbes. Whether the complex molecules in breast milk or the physical act of suckling on the nipple, this is the baby's "first vaccine" and "natural antibiotic." One mom encourages her young children to eat vegetables by telling them, "You have a zoo in you," and you must feed it.

Once most of the suspects are identified, *Let Them Eat Dirt* offers solutions. It does not actually encourage dirt eating but does discourage germophobic tendencies. Wash your hands after handling raw chicken, but don't stress over the five-second rule if you drop something on the floor. Get your good microbes from fermented foods, not from unregulated probiotic pills.

One promising scientifically tested and validated solution is next-generation probiotic-

s. Scientists are developing futuristic medicines that will manipulate the microbiome to rebalance ecosystems and target specific pathogens in the hope of eliminating antibiotics.

Advanced fecal transplant is a procedure dating back thousands of years to restore microbial health to the colon. Another promising procedure undergoing trial pilot studies is vaginal seeding—swabbing a C-section baby with vaginal fluids.

The film encourages viewers to use antibiotics wisely, elect to have a C-section only if medically necessary, breastfeed, urge their kids to follow a healthy diet and let their children play in the dirt. In our overreaction to dreaded diseases of the past, we have gone too far. We should not be scared if our kids play outside and get dirty. We should embrace that love of life, the skin-to-skin contact, human touch, breathing the air. It is both healthy and liberating.

Let Them Eat Dirt Tuesday, May 13th, 2025 @ 7:00 p.m.

Screening link: https://plowtoplatefilms.weebly.com/upcoming-events.html

To be added to our mailing list for future screening announcements, please email a request to plowtoplate@gmail.com.

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