Sub-optimal activity of gut microbiome functional pathways increases the odds of Irritable Bowel Syndrome in a large adult human population

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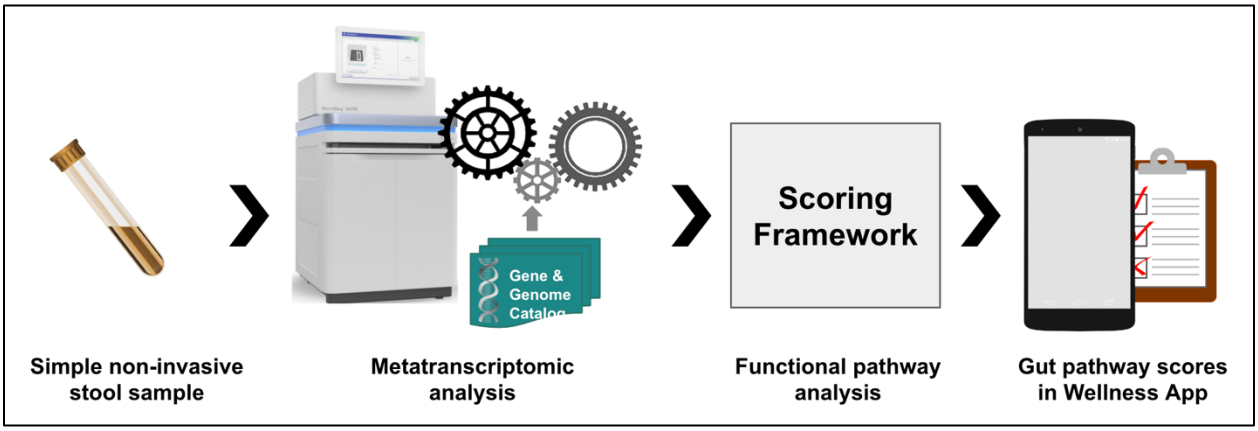
Graphical Abstract:



Abstract: We describe a data-driven computational approach for quantifying the microbial functional pathways in the gastrointestinal tract, based on an analysis of stool metatranscriptomic data within a large and diverse adult human population (n = 66,545). We develop a suite of eight gut microbial pathway scores, each of which represents the activity of a well-defined set of microbial functional features relevant to known gut biochemical activities. We use a normative approach within a subpopulation (n = 9,350) to determine the optimal and non-optimal levels of activity of these functional pathway scores. We hypothesize that non-optimal scores are associated with irritable bowel syndrome (IBS) and its subtypes (i.e., IBS-Constipation, IBS-Diarrhea, IBS-Mixed Type). We show that non-optimal scores within these microbial functional pathways are associated with higher odds of IBS or its subtypes within an independent cohort (n = 57,195). Given these findings, these gut pathway scores can be used to deliver meaningful health insights from simple, non-invasive stool samples, as potential molecular endpoints to measure the efficacy of practical interventions, and develop data-driven personalized algorithms aimed at providing nutritional recommendations, diagnostics, and treatments for IBS as well as related conditions.

Keywords: Stool; Metatranscriptomics; Gut microbiome; Functional pathways; Irritable bowel syndrome; Disorders of gut-brain interactions; Functional gastrointestinal diseases; Precision wellness

1. Introduction

Disorders of gut-brain interactions (DGBIs), previously known as functional gastrointestinal diseases [1], impact nearly 40% of the world's population [2]. According to the 2016 Rome IV criteria, there are more than 33 adult and 20 pediatric DGBIs [3], and there is frequent symptomatic overlap between the DGBI subtypes [4]. Their management is complex because known symptoms are subjective and have both varied presentations [5] and varied treatment strategies [6].

Clinically, DGBIs are situated at the interface of the gut-brain connection. They are often chronic, recurrent, debilitating, and do not have an identifiable underlying pathology [7]. However, DGBIs are affected by factors which are biological, psychological, and social, including sources which are environmental or dietary [8]. Common symptoms include altered stool quality and gut transit time, altered motility, hypersensitivity, altered mucosal function, immune disturbances, and altered central nervous system processing [3]. Individuals with DGBIs also frequently experience an altered gut microbiome, which presents an opportunity to leverage the gut microbiome for health insights and treatment strategies [9].

One of the most common DGBIs is Irritable Bowel Syndrome (IBS), affecting nearly 11% of the global population [10]. IBS is associated with a microbiome signature [11], but it is also a composite of multiple subtypes (i.e., IBS-Constipation [IBS-C], IBS-Diarrhea [IBS-D], IBS-Mixed Type [IBS-M]), each with potential for their own distinct microbiome signature [12,13]. Symptoms of IBS vary between patients and may include abdominal pain and discomfort related to abnormal bowel habits such as bloating, distention, as well as constipation (for IBS-C), diarrhea (for IBS-D), or both (for IBS-M), and the locations and patterns of these may change over time [14]. Further nuances of the symptoms may also distinguish "stool consistency", "gut transit time", and "motility"; for example, with IBS-C it is possible to experience an overall slower gut transit time with increased motility localized upstream of a blockage (i.e., the small intestines), and the associated bowel movement could have either increased or decreased firmness, depending on the stool consistency itself [15,16]. IBS patients continue to present a diagnostic and therapeutic challenge to healthcare providers. Many patients pursue a barrage of medical procedures in order to exclude other diagnoses, while experts plead for easier ways to identify the classical symptoms [17,18].

Considering the significant challenges and costs associated with diagnosing IBS and other DGBIs [18–20], there is ample opportunity to augment healthcare services with wellness tools such as molecular tests, diet changes, supplement use, and other behavioral changes. As of yet, there is still no definitive test for IBS, but great strides are being made to identify stool-based biomarkers which are also appropriately inclusive of IBS subtypes [21]. Even so, reactive measures such as diagnostics are not generally useful to proactive health measures [22–24], and there remain few options which individuals or providers can use in proactive healthcare [25]. A simple test, leveraging biomarkers and the microbiome, could assist in the effective treatment and proactive management of these patients, likely decreasing the number of treatments, diagnostic tests, and imaging studies which are often empiric, low yield, and costly.

We are dedicated to advancing personalized healthcare, and one step towards this goal is through delivering health insights of molecular activities within the gut. Recently, we developed a stool-based test to assess the gut metatranscriptome for application in a precision wellness application [26]. Central to our wellness approach is a comprehensive assessment of the molecular activities in a person's microbiome through a series of gut pathway wellness scores. Historically, many studies link chronic diseases such as IBS or other DGBIs to altered microbiomes with particular focus on taxonomic representation (i.e., species, genus, phylum, etc), but we quantify the active functions of those microbes, which are far more important to human health than taxonomic representation [27–29]. As visualized in Figure 1, for the gut pathway scores, microbial functions (i.e., gene expression) from stool samples are quantified as KEGG Orthologs (KOs) during high-resolution metatranscriptome sequencing of the gut microbiome [30,31]. Thus, each pathway score comprises a collection of microbial functions which are included because of their association with various health conditions according to the literature or clinical knowledge. Definitions for each score, including decisions on curating specific functions, are carefully considered by domain experts based on associations with diverse health conditions. Our meticulous approach, which is thoroughly detailed in our earlier publication [32], aligns pathway scores to focus on gut host-microbiome interactions crucial for maintaining human health. Ultimately, these scores offer valuable insights that can contribute to the development of methods to modulate microbial activities, thereby promoting improved health outcomes.

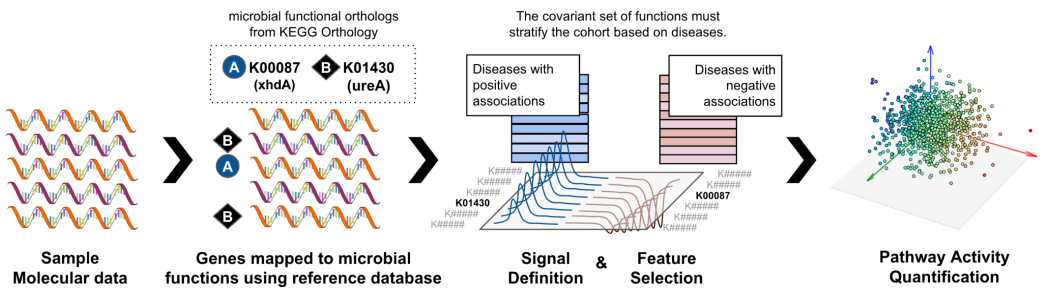


Figure 1. Scoring microbial functions in samples. KEGG identifiers (i.e., K00087 and K01430) are from *UricAcidProductionPathways* (Tables 7-8). Signal definition, Feature selection, and Pathway activity quantification are, respectively, Steps 3, 4, and 5 of the Score Development Framework in our earlier publication [32].

Herein, we present eight gut pathway scores which were designed to provide insights for both gastrointestinal and systemic health issues. We developed these scores through a previously described computational approach [32] in order to assess stool-based microbial pathway scores across a large cohort (n = 9,350). Through independent validation, we use IBS and its subtypes (IBS-C, IBS-D, and IBS-M) to confirm that the molecular features we detect in our microbial pathway scores differentiate disease phenotypes within an unseen cohort distinct from that used for score development.

2. Materials and Methods

Stool samples and associated metadata were obtained from Viome customers who were at least 18 years old at the time of sample collection. All customers consented to their data being used for research purposes, as part of the sign-up process for Viome services. Therefore, no IRB review was required for this data analysis.

Participants received Full Body Intelligence kits at their homes. Each kit included a stool collection tube featuring: 1) a scoop to facilitate stool collection, 2) RNA Preservation Buffer (RPB) to maintain RNA integrity during collection and transportation, and 3) sterile glass beads to facilitate sample homogenization. After stool collection, the user then caps the stool collection tube, vigorously shakes the RPB with stool, and ships the sample at room temperature. Clinically validated, RPB ensures the preservation of RNA for up to 28 days at room temperature [33].

When they collect their stool samples, individuals also respond to an extensive questionnaire detailing their lifestyle, conditions, and health history. Relevant lifestyle questions include use of proton-pump inhibitor (PPI) medication, recent use of antibiotics, and the use of disease-specific medication (i.e., antidiarrheals or laxatives/stool softeners). Relevant symptoms include abdominal pain, bloating, and stool classification according to the Bristol Stool Form Scale (BSFS) [34–36]. The BSFS is an ordinal scale of stool consistency ranging from the hardest (Type 1) to the softest (Type 7). Types 1 and 2 are considered to be abnormally hard stools (indicative of decreased gut transit time [35]) while Types 6 and 7 are considered abnormally loose/liquid stools (indicative of increased gut transit time [35]). Type 3, 4 and 5 are therefore generally considered to be the most 'normal' stool form (indicative of average gut transit time [35]). Health history is collected from both a multi-select question and open text response, resulting in hundreds of self-reported condition and disease phenotypes. Relevant self-reported health history includes IBS, IBS-C, IBS-D, and IBS-M, as well as all of the disease phenotypes listed in Supplementary Table S1. All study data are de-identified; data analysis team members have no access to personally identifiable information.

2.1 Cohort Development

To deliver health insights from stool samples, we design and validate wellness scores in the context of two cohorts that are representative of the general adult population. The initial "development" and "validation" cohorts began with around 10,000 and 60,000 samples, respectively. We further exclude outliers based on age, birth sex, and body mass index (BMI). Additional criteria are applied to mitigate artifacts linked to sequencing depth or data sparseness within each cohort. Samples included in the final cohorts contain at least 1,700 KOs, with a minimum total read count of 70,000. The final score development cohort consists of 9,350 stool samples from adults (59.4% females; Table 1). The final independent validation cohort consists of 57,195 stool samples from adults (66.1% females; Table 1).

Table 1. Sociodemographic, anthropometric, medication use, and IBS-related characteristics of the cohorts.

	Score Development Cohort (*n* = 9,350 stool samples)	**Independent Validation Cohort (*n* = 57,195 stool samples)**
Female	59.4%	66.1%
Age (years)	46.2 ± 13.0	44.9 ± 13.7
BMI (kg/m^2)	26.1 ± 5.4	25.9 ± 6.1
Ethnicity	74.2% White From the remaining 25.8%: 28.9% Hispanic or Latino 28.1% Multi-ethnic 19.2% Asian 11.1% Black or African American 5.6% Arab or Middle Eastern 7.0% Other	74.2% White From the remaining 25.8%: 28.5% Hispanic or Latino 27.2% Multi-ethnic 18.6% Asian 11.9% Black or African American 6.2% Arab or Middle Eastern 7.6% Other
PPI use[1]	4.2%	4.4%
Antibiotic use[2]	8.7%	5.5%
Medication use	0.5% Antidiarrheal meds 2.4% Laxatives/stool softeners	0.6% Antidiarrheal meds 2.9% Laxatives/stool softeners
Sample BSFS[3]		
< 3	19.4%	19.3%
3 < 6	52.6%	51.6%
≥ 6	28.0%	28.9%
No answer	0.02%	0.02%
Abdominal Pain		
Never	42.4%	37.6%
< 1 day/wk	35.8%	36.1%
1-6 days/wk	18.4%	22.3%
7 days/wk	3.3%	3.9%
No answer	0.2%	0.2%
Bloating		
Never	16.0%	13.2%
Rarely	25.8%	22.6%
Sometimes	30.6%	30.7%
Often	20.0%	23.7%
Always	7.5%	9.6%
No answer	0.2%	0.2%

[1] PPI = Proton-pump inhibitor.
[1,2] Defined as "currently taking them" or "have taken them in the past month".
[3] Bristol Stool Form Score (average of multiple selection, rounded down). < 3: indicative of decreased gut transit time (1 = Separate hard pellets; 2 = Clumpy log shaped); 3 < 6: indicative of average gut transit time (3 = Log shape with cracks on the surface; 4 = Smooth snake shape; 5 = Soft chunks); ≥ 6: indicative of increased gut transit time (6 = Paste consistency with ragged edges; 7 = Liquid consistency with no solid pieces)

2.2 Metatranscriptomic Analysis

Stool samples are collected and analyzed from individuals who undergo a minimum 8-hour fasting period. With established metatranscriptomic techniques [33], the entire set of transcripts (RNA molecules) from each stool sample is measured, providing both the primary sequence and read count for each transcript. Each sequencing read is aligned to microbial genomes as follows: Viome utilizes a custom reference catalog that ecompasses 32,599 genomes from NCBI RefSeq release 205 "complete genome" category, as well as 4,644 representative human gut genomes of UHGG [37], ribosomal RNA (rRNA) gene sequences, and the human genome GRCh38 [38]. Altogether, the custom catalog spans archaea, bacteria, fungi, protozoa, phages, viruses,

and the human host, with a total of 98,527,909 annotated microbial genes. To annotate microbial gene functions, the KEGG Orthology (KO) [30,31] is adopted, utilizing eggNOG-mapper [39]. Taxonomy classification (at all taxonomic levels) is accomplished through mapping paired-end reads to the custom catalog using Centrifuge [40]. Any reads mapped to the host genome or rRNA sequences are excluded from further analysis but tracked for monitoring. To estimate expression level (or activity) in the sample, an Expectation-Maximization (EM) algorithm [41] is applied to mapped microbial reads. Respective taxonomic ranks (strains, species, genera, etc.) can be aggregated from the genomes. For the current study, species activity is used in the downstream analyses. The reads mapped to microbial genomes are specifically extracted and mapped to gene or open reading frame (ORF) regions for molecular function or KO annotation and quantification. The identified KOs from stool samples are used in downstream analyses, such as score development, validation, and ultimately scoring new samples.

2.3 Score Development

Our stool-based scores are intended to deliver health insights using only microbial functions (i.e., gene expression) from the gut microbiome. We follow a similar approach for score development as we previously reported for saliva-based scores with the oral microbiome [32].

The final scores are composed entirely of microbial KOs quantified in stool, each of which either positively or negatively covariate with the complete set of KOs. In developing the stool-based scores, we explore domain concepts including carbon and energy metabolism, aerobic/anaerobic metabolism, activities related to vitamins and protein cofactors, metabolism of amino acids and nucleic acids, environmental stressors, known pathogenic components, etc. The microbial KOs included in the selection process are identified because of their association with one or more of these physiological processes. In the final step of our development process, we leverage the covariance of the feature set within a normalized expression dataset, and we aggregate the computationally determined weights, based on the first component (PC1) of Principal Component Analysis (PCA). When the final scores are computed on a large cohort, they exhibit a gaussian-like curve which represents the stratification of health insights and distribution of scores across the population (shown in Supplemental Figure S1).

Our five-step process for score development was previously explained in detail [32], including: 1) Domain exploration; 2) Metadata curation; 3) Signal definition; 4) Feature selection; and 5) Pathway activity quantification. The complete details of each step are available in our earlier report but for context are briefly reviewed.

Through domain exploration, we define both the conceptual landscape for the score and the entire set of microbial KOs relevant to the score. The metadata curation process includes identifying and creating case/control labels which enable downstream steps as well as the validation presented in this manuscript. Signal definition is the early draft of a score, meaning a small set of KOs demonstrating covariance which stratifies health insights across the development cohort. The feature selection process is extremely iterative and serves to strengthen the score's ability to stratify health insights in a manner consistent with domain knowledge. The final step, pathway activity quantification, is the aggregate quantification of the entire set of KO features in a score by combining the expression levels of the selected KOs. As we previously reported [32], "we derive a pathway score as a weighted function Score = $C1F1 + C2F2 + \ldots + CnFn$, where Fi is the expression level of the feature and Ci is its weight."

The overall implementation of scores is a normative approach [42]; the development cohort serves as a reference population which provides weightings of each feature that can be used to compute scores for all new samples. After using the development cohort to design the scores with a numeric value between 0 and 100, the numerical values are further signed with one of the categories, "Good", "Average", or "Not Optimal", based on the score distribution in the development cohort. We adopt MAD (median absolute deviation), a measure of dispersion and robust to outliers. The categorical thresholds are calculated using $median \pm 0.75 * MAD$ of the respective score distribution in the development cohort. "Good" refers to the higher end, "Not Optimal" the lower end, and "Average" the middle range.

2.4 Score Validation

The validation cohort, consisting of 57,195 stool samples, is used to confirm the reproducibility of signals identified during score development. This cohort is a previously unseen sample set; there is no overlap between the independent validation cohort and score development cohort. For the validation process, we take a general wellness approach and evaluate the ability for each of the eight scores to differentiate gastrointestinal diseases known to be associated with the gut microbiome.

The focus of the validation process in this paper employs both odds ratios (OR) and case/control difference analysis to test scores with IBS and each subtype (IBS-C, IBS-D, IBS-M). Cases for each IBS subtype were defined by responses to the question: "Please list all of the illnesses you are currently suffering from or diagnosed with." The list included IBS, IBS-C, IBS-D, and

IBS-M, and all such metadata labels defined in the development cohort are also applied to the validation cohort. Based on these labels, controls are carefully curated using domain knowledge to identify and exclude cases likely to have a "Not Optimal" score; therefore, control definitions are score-specific (see Supplementary Table S1). Cases are matched to controls (1:5) on age, birth sex, BMI, and month sequenced. Age matching allows for ±5 years with respect to case. For BMI, matching is performed within defined cates: BMI < 15 is classified as an outlier, 15 ≤ BMI < 18.5 (classified as "underweight"), 18.5 ≤ BMI < 24.9 ("healthy"), 24.9 ≤ BMI < 29.9 ("overweight"), and 29.9 ≤ BMI ("obese"). For month sequenced, matching was performed within a window of ±3 months.

Across the cohorts, values for each score reached "Good", "Average", or "Not Optimal", and for odds ratios, we focus on the odds for "Not Optimal" scores as compared to the odds for "Good" scores. For case/control difference analysis, the case mean is presented alongside the control mean and lower scores are closer to "Not Optimal." Using the score category (i.e., "Not Optimal" or "Good") as the independent variable and IBS subtype as the dependent variable, a logistic regression model is applied while adjusting for age, BMI, and disease-specific medication as confounders. Odds ratio is defined as the odds of having a "Not Optimal" score with an IBS subtype over having a "Good" score with the same IBS subtype. Statistical comparison of scores between matched case/control samples is carried out using the two-tailed Mann-Whitney U test, and the Benjamini-Hochberg correction is applied to control the False Discovery Rate.

3. Results

3.1 Cohort Characteristics

We employ two large cohorts: 1) a score development cohort is used to facilitate a heuristic approach for feature (KO) selection during our score design process; and 2) an independent validation cohort is used to assess the performance of each score. The composition of both cohorts are comparable; the development cohort (9,350 stool samples from adults; 59.4% female) has an average age of 46.2 ± 13.0 years and BMI of 26.1 ± 5.4 kg/m^2, while the validation cohort (57,195 stool samples from adults; 66.1% female) has an average age of 44.9 ± 13.7 years and BMI of 25.9 ± 6.1 kg/m^2.

Table 1 shows characteristics for each cohort at the time of sample collection, including sociodemographics (age, birth sex, ethnicity), anthropometrics (BMI), and medication use (PPI, antibiotics, anti-diarrhea meds, and laxatives/stool softeners). Additional characteristics related to IBS include the Bristol Stool classification of the bowel movement that was sampled for the cohort, abdominal pain frequency over the 3 months prior to sampling, and frequency of bloating.

Since our validation of stool-based scores focuses on individuals with IBS, we present the IBS-related characteristics across the two cohorts in Tables 2-5. In each table, IBS is defined as the complete set of individuals who self-reported IBS or any IBS subtype (IBS-C, IBS-D, IBS-M). The trends reported are similar across both the score development cohort and the independent validation cohort.

Table 2. Gut transit time as measured by Bristol Stool Scores for the sampled (analyzed) bowel movement from IBS (any subtype) and IBS subtypes across cohorts (totaling 5,521 individuals).

	Slower transit time (BFSF* < 3)	Average transit time (BFSF 3 < 6)	Faster transit time (BFSF ≥ 6)
Score Development Cohort			
IBS (*n* = 599)	17.7%	49.4%	32.9%
IBS-C (*n* = 132)	**23.9%**	50.8%	25.8%
IBS-D (*n* = 101)	10.9%	43.6%	**45.5%**
IBS-M (*n* = 85)	16.5%	47.1%	36.5%
Independent Validation Cohort			
IBS (*n* = 4,922)	20.1%	44.3%	35.6%
IBS-C (*n* = 1,126)	**29.4%**	42.7%	27.9%
IBS-D (*n* = 695)	12.4%	40.3%	**47.3%**
IBS-M (*n* = 760)	21.3%	41.6%	37.1%

Bold numbers indicate the highest values across columns with abnormal gut transit time.
* Bristol Stool Form Score (see Table 1 for categorical definitions)

Table 3. Abdominal pain reported by individuals with IBS (n = 5,521) and Non-IBS (n = 61,024).

Score Development Cohort	IBS (any subtype; n = 599)	Non-IBS (n = 8,751)
Abdominal Pain		
Never	13.0%	**44.4%**
< 1 day/wk	28.0%	36.3%
1-6 days/wk	**44.7%**	16.6%
7 days/wk	13.9%	2.5%
No answer	0.3%	0.2%
Independent Validation Cohort	IBS (any subtype; n = 4,922)	Non-IBS (n = 52,273)
Abdominal Pain		
Never	10.6%	**40.1%**
< 1 day/wk	27.9%	36.8%
1-6 days/wk	**48.1%**	19.9%
7 days/wk	13.4%	3.0%
No answer	0.04%	0.2%

Bold numbers indicate the highest values across columns regarding abdominal pain frequency.

Table 4. Gut transit time as measured by Bristol Stool Scores for recent atypical bowel movements from IBS (any subtype) and IBS subtypes across cohorts (totaling 5,521 individuals).

	Slower transit time (BFSF** < 3)	Average transit time (BFSF 3 < 6)	Faster transit time (BFSF ≥ 6)	Mixed transit time (BFSF < 3 & ≥ 6)	No answer*
Score Development Cohort					
IBS (n = 599)	21.7%	4.8%	28.7%	31.4%	13.4%
IBS-C (n = 132)	**43.9%**	3.8%	6.1%	28.8%	17.4%
IBS-D (n = 101)	2.0%	0.0%	**67.3%**	18.8%	11.9%
IBS-M (n = 85)	11.8%	2.4%	29.4%	**49.4%**	7.1%
Independent Validation Cohort					
IBS (n = 4,922)	21.4%	5.2%	31.5%	31.1%	10.7%
IBS-C (n = 1,126)	**51.6%**	4.6%	6.6%	24.6%	12.6%
IBS-D (n = 695)	2.2%	1.3%	**68.2%**	14.0%	14.4%
IBS-M (n = 760)	9.3%	2.6%	24.6%	**54.5%**	8.9%

Bold numbers indicate the highest values across columns with abnormal gut transit time.
* Responses were not recorded for individuals who never experienced abdominal pain.
** Bristol Stool Form Score (see Table 1 for categorical definitions)

Table 5. Bloating frequency reported by individuals with IBS (n = 5,521) and Non-IBS (n = 61,024).

Score Development Cohort	IBS (any subtype; n = 599)	Non-IBS (n = 8,751)
Bloating frequency		
Less than average	15.4%	**43.5%**
Average	30.4%	30.6%
More than average	**53.9%**	25.7%
No answer	0.3%	0.2%
Independent Validation Cohort	IBS (any subtype; n = 4,922)	Non-IBS (n = 52,273)
Bloating frequency		
Less than average	14.1%	**37.9%**
Average	26.7%	31.0%
More than average	**59.2%**	30.9%
No answer	0.04%	0.2%

Bold numbers indicate the highest values across columns regarding bloating frequency.

Table 2 shows the Bristol Stool classification of the sampled bowel movement, stratified by IBS subtype; a higher proportion of individuals with IBS-C self-report slower gut transit times while a higher proportion of those with IBS-D self-report faster gut transit times. Individuals with IBS-M report Bristol Stool classifications similar to the entire set of individuals with IBS, which also closely follows the general cohort population.

Table 3 shows responses of recent abdominal pain, broken down for those with IBS and those without IBS; across both cohorts, individuals with IBS reported more frequent abdominal pain than those without IBS. When stratified by IBS subtype, the numbers were generally similar across all subtypes (not shown).

Those individuals who reported any abdominal pain (Table 3) were also asked for the Bristol Stool classification of their recent atypical bowel movements, and these are stratified across IBS subtypes in Table 4. As the numbers show, the trends highlighted in bold in Table 2 are even more prominent in Table 4. A higher proportion of individuals with IBS-C indicated decreased gut transit time ("usually constipation; BSFS 1-2"), while a higher proportion of individuals with IBS-D indicated increased gut transit time ("usually diarrhea; BSFS 6-7"). A higher proportion of individuals with IBS-M indicated mixed gut transit time ("both constipation and diarrhea").

Table 5 shows responses of typical bloating, broken down for those with IBS and those without IBS; across both cohorts, individuals with IBS reported more frequent bloating than those without IBS. When stratified by IBS subtype, the numbers were generally similar across all subtypes (not shown).

3.2 Metatranscriptomic Analysis

We present high-level metrics of development cohort (n = 9,350) and independent validation cohort (n = 57,195) to demonstrate sample data quality. The total number of reads in paired-end fastq files in millions for both cohorts combined is 10.93 ± 4.60. The average KO richness or unique KOs associated with each sample for development and validation cohorts combined is 3592 ± 680. Species richness, defined as unique species identified in each sample across development and validation cohorts combined, is 1411 ± 498. Effective sequencing depth, defined as the total number of reads in millions mapped to a recognized element like KO or species for both cohorts combined, is 3.40 ± 2.24.

3.3 Score Development

As we previously published [43], our Score Development Framework is a 5-step process. A high level summary for each of the eight gut pathway scores appears in Table 6, including key functions and a brief description of microbial activities. Altogether, the eight scores comprise a total of 278 KOs (259 distinct KOs), where 242 KOs (or 93%) appear only once across all scores and 17 KOs (or 6.5%) each appear in 2-3 scores. Any two scores share a maximum of three KOs. The number of KOs in each score ranges from 19 to 63, with the final number determined heuristically rather than stringent limits. While the process is similar for each score, all scores are developed independently from each other, with key functions, components, metadata and phenotype data driving feature selection.

The first step in the framework is domain-driven curation for potential inclusion of features (KO) in score development. As an example, the *UricAcidProduction-Pathways* was designed by curating "key components" and "key functions" centered around microbial nucleotide, nucleoside and purine degradation generating uric acid (Table 7). KOs were considered for inclusion if they impacted these "in scope" parameters.

The second and third steps involve metadata curation and signal definition in our development cohort. These steps provide information useful for step four, feature selection, which involves the iterative refinement of the KOs that define a score.

The final step involves pathway activity quantification. Depicted in Table 8 is the score definition for *UricAcidProductionPathways* score, along with the corresponding weights (loadings) derived from the first principle component (PC1) of a principal component analysis (PCA) (see Materials and Methods). The KOs with negative loadings represent microbial uric acid production, which is undesirable and therefore higher expression of these features would result in a lower score. The loadings in Table 8 also include KOs with positive loadings, which represent uric acid degradation or alternative metabolism, and a higher expression of these features would result in a higher score.

3.4 Score Validation

We use the independent validation cohort to examine whether the stool-based scores associate with phenotypes as expected by domain knowledge. We choose IBS and IBS subtypes (IBS-C, IBS-D, IBS-M) to stratify the scores, because these IBS subtypes have altered gut microbiomes and, to some extent, share underlying symptoms such as altered gut transit, altered stool consistency, abdominal pain, and bloating [44,45].

For simplicity, we only report on "Not Optimal" scores, using "Good" scores as a reference point. The translational interpretation for each "Not Optimal" score is presented in Table 9. For example, in the case of *UricAcidProductionPathways*, a "Not Optimal" score indicates the microbial gene expression contains more functions with negative loadings and fewer functions with positive loadings from Table 8; this may be interpreted as increased uric acid production (Table 9).

Table 6. High level overview of Stool Pathways Scores

Score Name	Key Functions	Microbial Activities	KOs
ButyrateProductionPathways	Butanoate metabolism Lysine degradation Fatty acid degradation BCAA[1] degradation Propanoate metabolism	Accumulation of beneficial butyrate from pyruvate and by degradation of fatty acids, lysine, and BCAAs.	39
GABAProductionPathways	Butanoate metabolism Pentose/glucuronate interconversions Vitamin B6 metabolism Amino/nucleotide sugar metabolism	Accumulation of GABA[3] from various substrates including butanoate. Along with synthesis of cofactors needed for enzymes that produce GABA, including vitamin B6.	63
LacticAcidProductionPathways	Lactate transport Pyruvate metabolism Other glycan degradation	Metabolism and transport of butyrate, pyruvate, and lactate, including carbon flow specific to the accumulation of lactic acid.	30
LPSBiosynthesisPathways	Lipopolysaccharide biosynthesis KDO2-lipid A biosynthesis Nucleotide sugar biosynthesis	Accumulation of beneficial and deleterious LPS modifications, nucleotide sugars, and related processing of glutamine/glutamate/ammonia.	24
MethanogenesisPathways	Methane metabolism Formaldehyde assimilation Fructose/mannose metabolism Pentose phosphate pathway	Several methods of methane production, ammonia release from amino acids, and pentose phosphate activity.	47
OxalateMetabolismPathways	Oxalate degradation Glyoxylate/dicarboxylate metabolism Ascorbate/aldarate metabolism	Accumulation of oxalate and glyoxylate precursors, including the metabolism of related vitamins and carbon compounds.	28
SulfideProductionPathways	Sulfur metabolism Taurine/hypotaurine metabolism Glycine/serine/threonine metabolism	TCA[2]-related energy processes as well as the generation of sulfide from organic sulfur-containing amino acids and inorganic sources like sulfite and sulfate.	28
UricAcidProductionPathways	Nucleotide metabolism Purine metabolism Hypoxanthine oxidation C4-Dicarboxylate sensing	Beneficial production of trehalose and processing of purines like adenine, guanine, inosine, xanthine, and urate.	19

[1] BCAA = Branched-chain amino acid.
[2] TCA = Tricarboxylic Acid.
[3] GABA = Gamma-aminobutyric acid.

Table 7. Scope of the *UricAcidProductionPathways* Score.

Key components	Nucleotides	AMP, GMP, 3'-GMP, IMP
	Nucleosides	Adenosine, guanosine, inosine, xanthosine
	Purines	Adenine, guanine, hypoxanthine, xanthine, uric acid
	Enzymes	Oxidoreductases, deaminases, nucleotidases
	Cofactors	NADH, molybdenum, FAD
Key functions	Purine metabolism	Hypoxanthine oxidation
	Nucleotide metabolism	Adenosine degradation, guanosine degradation
	Energy extraction	Anaerobic fermentation
	Two-component systems	C4-Dicarboxylate sensing and transport
	Other	Molybdenum biosynthesis, quorum sensing

Table 8. Score design for *UricAcidProductionPathways*. Loadings originate from the first principle component of PCA analysis using the development cohort.

Loadings	KEGG Ortholog (KO) and Description
0.42707	K07651 (resE); two-component system, OmpR family, sensor histidine kinase
0.30347	K04076 (lonB); ATP-dependent Lon protease
0.27966	K18011 (kamE); beta-lysine 5,6-aminomutase beta subunit
0.27711	K18532 (AK6, FAP7); adenylate kinase
0.24838	K01236 (treZ, glgZ); maltooligosyltrehalose trehalohydrolase
0.06793	K01430 (ureA); urease subunit gamma
0.05184	K00948 (PRPS, prsA); ribose-phosphate pyrophosphokinase
0.04766	K00839 (pucG); (S)-ureidoglycine-glyoxylate transaminase
-0.02885	K21053 (ade); adenine deaminase
-0.06887	K20967 (MOCS1); GTP 3',8-cyclase / cyclic pyranopterin monophosphate synthase
-0.08136	K00087 (ygeS, xdhA); xanthine dehydrogenase molybdenum-binding subunit
-0.10569	K13479 (ygeT, xdhB); xanthine dehydrogenase FAD-binding subunit
-0.18014	K15973 (mhqR); MarR family transcriptional regulator
-0.22229	K13483 (yagT); xanthine dehydrogenase YagT iron-sulfur-binding subunit
-0.22525	K00364 (guaC), GMPR; GMP reductase
-0.26568	K11711 (dctS); two-component system, LuxR family, sensor histidine kinase
-0.26922	K03787 (surE); 5'/3'-nucleotidase
-0.30322	K07084 (yuiF); putative amino acid transporter
-0.32907	K10558 (lsrA, ego); AI-2 transport system ATP-binding protein

Score Name	"Not Optimal" Interpretation	Potential Actionability	Supporting Evidence
ButyrateProductionPathways	Functions indicate *decreased* butyrate production.	Influence gut microbiota to *increase* butyrate levels.	[46–49]
GABAProductionPathways	Functions indicate *decreased* GABA production.	Influence gut microbiota to *increase* GABA levels.	[50,51]
LacticAcidProductionPathways	Functions indicate *increased* lactic acid production.	Influence gut microbiota to *decrease* lactate levels.	[52–54]
LPSBiosynthesisPathways	Functions indicate *increased* deleterious LPS production.	Influence gut microbiota to *decrease* deleterious LPS levels.	[55–57]
MethanogenesisPathways	Functions indicate *increased* methane production from SCFAs.	Influence gut microbiota to *decrease* methane levels.	[58,59]
OxalateMetabolismPathways	Functions indicate *decreased* oxalate metabolism.	Influence gut microbiota to *increase* oxalate metabolism.	[60–62]
SulfideProductionPathways	Functions indicate *increased* sulfide production.	Influence gut microbiota to *decrease* sulfide levels.	[44,59,63]
UricAcidProductionPathways	Functions indicate *increased* uric acid production.	Influence gut microbiota to *decrease* uric acid levels.	[64,65]

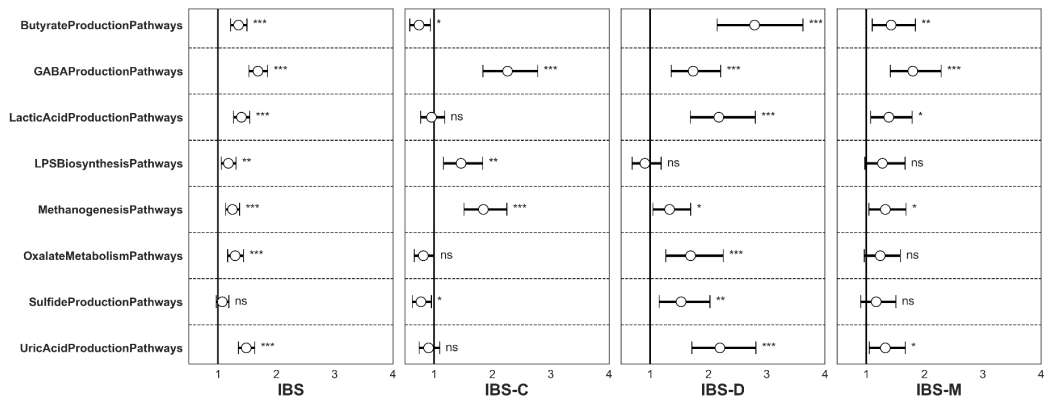


Figure 2. Odds ratios for each "Not Optimal" score stratified by IBS subtype. "Good" scores serve as the reference group and are indicated by the vertical line at 1. The maximum number of cases available for 1:5 matching are given in Table S2. Definitions for "controls" are score-specific and specified in Table S1, including the minimum size of the control pool available for 1:5 matching. $p \leq 0.05$ (*); $p \leq 0.01$ (**); $p \leq 0.001$ (***); not significant (ns). Numerical values for all odds ratios are shown in Table S3.

Focusing on "Not Optimal" scores, we present the odds ratios for IBS and its subtypes in Figure 2, where the vertical line at 1 represents the reference group, "Good" scores. Numerical values for these are shown in Supplementary Table S3. The odd ratios indicate the likelihood that someone with a "Not Optimal" score also has the IBS subtype (without informing about causality). As seen in Figure 2, odds ratios demonstrate that the scores can variably differentiate IBS subtypes. Case/control difference analyses were performed as a secondary technique and generally agree with these findings (Supplementary Table S2).

4. Discussion

There is an intricate relationship between the gut microbiome and systemic health. Increasing evidence highlights that microbial functions within the gut are important for understanding, preventing, and treating many health issues, including DGBIs like IBS. We provide health insights based not simplistically on the microbiome composition alone, but critically, on microbial functions (KOs) detected through a metatranscriptomic analysis of the gut microbiome. For development of the eight gut scores (Table 6), we prioritize their generalizability across both systemic and chronic health issues while focusing on gastrointestinal conditions. For validation of the scores, we select IBS and its subtypes in order to leverage both the underlying symptoms shared across IBS subtypes as well as their divergent characteristics like altered gut transit and altered gut microbiomes [41,42]. Through this independent validation, we show the gut pathway scores exhibit reproducibility in stratifying molecular insights based on signals identified during score development.

4.1. Considerations for score development and cohort definitions

In our earlier report [32], we discuss how the development and independent validation cohorts are important to the process. For example, the size of each cohort facilitates both an array of metadata labels and a large sample count for each "case." As seen in Tables 1-5, the two cohorts are comparable in terms of anthropometrics, sociodemographics, medication use (PPIs, antibiotics, anti-diarrheals, and laxatives/stool softeners), and IBS-related characteristics (i.e., stool quality, abdominal pain, bloating, and gut transit time). Our findings are reproducible across two cohorts of similar composition, supporting an unbiased comparison between the two cohorts.

All of the cohort metadata labels used to define "case" (IBS and its subtypes) and "controls" (Supplementary Table S1) are identified through self-reported questionnaires, which could raise concerns since self-reported health information is sometimes questionable [66,67]. In order to mitigate these concerns, Tables 2-5 corroborate the labels for IBS and its subtypes. In Tables 2 and 4, we see variability in self-reported gut transit times which align with expectations for self-reported IBS subtypes; those with slower transit times most often self-report IBS-C, while those with faster transit times most often self-reported IBS-D, and those with mixed atypical bowel movements most often self-reported IBS-M. Similar trends are shown in Tables 3 and

5 for the frequency of abdominal pain and bloating (respectively) between those who self-reported IBS and those who did not ("Non-IBS"). As expected, there was no noticeable trend for abdominal pain and bloating when tabulated across IBS subtypes (not shown). The corroborating evidence supports using self-reported health insights to drive definitions for IBS and its subtypes.

4.2. Unpacking the UricAcidProductionPathways gut score

During score development, we deeply explore the domain knowledge to identify the biological phenomena central to each score before finalizing an appropriate set of features that make up the score. In the case of *UricAcidProductionPathways*, score KOs are related to the biochemical production of uric acid by the gut microbiome; they are associated with the production or degradation of purines (Tables 7-8), and a "Not Optimal" *UricAcidProductionPathways* score indicates increased levels of uric acid (Table 9). As seen in Figure 2, the odds of having a "Not Optimal" *UricAcidProductionPathways* score is significantly higher for those who reported IBS (OR = 1.5; 95% Confidence Interval [CI]: 1.4-1.6), IBS-D (OR = 2.2; 95% CI: 1.7-2.8), or IBS-M (OR = 1.3; 95% CI: 1.1-1.7), but not IBS-C. Thus, the implication is that those with IBS, IBS-D, or IBS-M are more likely to have activity related to increased uric acid levels, as measured with the *UricAcidProductionPathways* gut score. However, this does not apply to IBS-C in our large cohort. These odd ratios agree with the case/control difference analyses showing that individuals with IBS, IBS-D, and IBS-M also have significantly lower mean scores (Table S2). Understanding the implications of our findings requires further research, because the relationship between uric acid levels and IBS has not been fully elucidated. However, several studies support a link between purine levels and IBS subtypes [68–71], and there are well-documented associations between high uric acid levels (hyperuricemia) and inflammatory diseases (i.e., gout [72,73], hypertension [74], metabolic syndrome [75], and chronic kidney disease [76]) which are, in turn, associated with IBS or its subtypes [65,77–79]. Furthermore, purinergic receptors are implicated in secretomotor reflexes of the gastrointestinal tract [80–82] and are actively pursued as IBS drug targets [83,84].

The implementation of dietary modifications based on these scores is beyond the scope of this manuscript, but we wanted to include an example of such recommendations in order to benefit those interested in the application of biomarkers to wellness. Within our wellness platform, *UricAcidProductionPathways* is implemented such that those with a "Not Optimal" score are encouraged to avoid foods high in purines, such as scallops, clams, and lobster [85,86].

4.3. Interpreting the gut pathway scores with IBS and IBS subtypes

We report thirty two odds ratios for the eight gut pathway scores, where individuals with IBS and its subtypes have generally higher likelihood to present "Not Optimal" scores (Figure 2). For twenty two of the odds ratios, IBS or its subtypes are significantly more likely to present "Not Optimal" scores. Eight other odds ratios are indistinguishable from "Good", and for the remaining two odds ratios, IBS-C is less likely to present "Not Optimal" scores. A single high-level interpretation of the findings in Figure 2 is challenging; conceptually, each score could be the focus of its own publication, because they are designed to cover distinct biological phenomena. Furthermore, each odds ratio is computed with its own case/control definitions (Tables S1-S3), but highlighting specific findings may prove useful for identifying future areas of research.

Overall, Figure 2 indicates those with IBS-D present with more "Not Optimal" scores than those with IBS-C, IBS-M, and even the IBS composite. The reason for this is not known, but faster gut transit times are associated with an altered microbiome [87] and altered fecal metabolites [88], and it is possible that the gut is impacted to a greater degree with IBS-D. For three of the scores which fit this pattern: "Not Optimal" corresponds to increased production of lactic acid with *LacticAcidProduction-Pathways*, decreased degradation of oxalates with *OxalateMetabolismPathways*, and increased production of sulfide with *SulfideProductionPathways* (Table 9). These odds ratios agree with the literature, which indicates that IBS-D and/or diarrhea is associated with increased levels of lactic acid [89,90], oxalates [60,91], and sulfides [59,63,92].

Of all the odds ratios, the largest value is for *ButyrateProductionPathways* with IBS-D (OR = 2.8; 95% CI: 2.1-3.6), for which a "Not Optimal" score corresponds to decreased production of butyrate (Table 9). Thus, individuals with IBS-D may have reduced activity related to butyrate production, as measured with the *ButyrateProductionPathways* gut score. While there are conflicting reports regarding fecal butyrate levels in IBS-D, IBS-D is associated with fewer butyrate-producing microbes [45,47], and butyrate supplementation is known to improve symptoms [93,94]. Of course, the gastrointestinal role of butyrate and other short-chain fatty acids (SCFAs) is quite complex and their specific impact on IBS-D remains to be elucidated.

One striking trend is the increased likelihood for each of IBS, IBS-C, IBS-D, and IBS-M to present "Not Optimal" *GABAProductionPathways* scores (Figure 2), corresponding to decreased production of gamma-aminobutyric acid (GABA) as seen in Table 9. GABA is a major inhibitory neurotransmitter and can be produced by gut microbes [95]. One role GABA plays in the

gastrointestinal tract is to dampen pain, and consistent with our cohort metadata (Table 3), increased abdominal pain is a cardinal feature of IBS [96]. It is possible that reduced GABA impairs gastrointestinal pain processing for IBS and its subtypes [97]. Beyond the gut, reduced GABA function is associated with depression and anxiety [98], and IBS patients are at higher risk of developing depression or anxiety compared to the general population [99]. Many studies support that GABA dysregulation plays a role in IBS, and this is consistent with our findings.

Our findings also indicate that those with IBS-C are more likely to present "Not Optimal" *LPSBiosynthesis-Pathways* scores (Figure 2), corresponding to increased deleterious microbial LPS production (Table 9). LPS is the major surface membrane component of almost all Gram-negative bacteria [100], and its role in promoting inflammation is well-documented [101]. However, there is tremendous heterogeneity in LPS structural modifications [102], and associations between microbes and IBS symptoms have been inconsistent or even contradictory [103]. In contrast to expectations, some components and versions of LPS are even antagonistic to inflammatory responses [104,105]. Most studies which link IBS to LPS focus on levels of LPS in blood, and much of the information regarding levels of LPS in stool is conflicting. Although LPS can cause diarrhea through endotoxemia [106], the only consistent reports we could find linking IBS to fecal LPS levels indicated those with constipation were more likely to have elevated fecal LPS [57,107–109].

The odds ratios for IBS-C highlight one more notable finding: for two scores, individuals with IBS-C are less likely to present with "Not Optimal" scores ([OR = 0.7; 95% CI: 0.6 - 0.9] for *ButyrateProductionPathways* and [OR = 0.8; 95% CI: 0.6 - 1.0] for *SulfideProductionPathways*). These values are inverted from IBS-D, and this is best explained in the context of IBS-C individuals being more likely to present with "Not Optimal" *Methanogenesis-Pathways* scores (OR = 1.8; 95% CI: 1.5 - 2.3), which corresponds to increased methane produced from SCFAs (Table 9). Methane production in the gut is well-documented and correlated with IBS-C [59,110]. Recently, it has been shown to affect gut transit time and intestinal peristaltic activity, eventually leading to constipation [110]. It is also naturally correlated with bloating and flatulence [111]. In light of increased methane among those with IBS-C, it is not surprising for IBS-C individuals to have increased butyrate production (i.e., reduced likelihood of "Not Optimal" scores for *Butyrate-ProductionPathways*), because butyrate is a SCFA that directly or indirectly (i.e., via acetate) promotes both methanogenesis [112] and constipation [113]). We can also expect a trend for IBS-C individuals to generally present with decreased levels of sulfide (i.e., decreased likelihood of "Not Optimal" scores for *SulfideProduction-Pathways*), because sulfate reduction often restricts methanogenesis via several pathways [114], with some exceptions [115,116]. Furthermore, IBS studies often report sulfide as a driver of IBS-D and methane as a driver of IBS-C [59,117].

Several limitations exist for this study. The analysis includes case/control differences as part of its validation but may not address all potential confounding factors. The current analyses cannot establish causality due to the composition of scores, which likely consist of KO features comprising both causal and consequential elements. Future studies will be conducted to delineate causal features through prospective interventional trials. While our cohorts are extensive and encompass various demographics, they may not entirely mirror every demographic group in the USA or other nations. Additionally, the metadata labels rely on self-reported data, which may be prone to misreporting; however, given the very large size of our cohorts, any such discrepancies are likely to be insignificant.

5. Conclusions

To conclude, we summarize here the novel methods, findings, and some implications for current applications and future research.

Using stool metatranscriptomic data from a large adult population (n = 9,350), we have developed a suite of gut microbiome functional pathway scores that represent the biochemical activity of well-known processes in the gastrointestinal tract. The process for developing these pathway scores includes 5 iterative steps: domain exploration, metadata curation, signal definition, feature selection and pathway activity quantification. We employ a normative approach to determining the optimal and non-optimal segments of the score distributions within the development cohort. To verify that these pathways are consistent with their intended purpose, we confirm that the pathways are differentially active in a case/control analysis of IBS and subtypes within a large independent adult population (n = 57,195). Furthermore, we compute the odds that a non-optimal pathway activity of each of scores is associated with IBS or its subtypes.

The main finding in this paper is that there is a significantly higher odds of IBS and subtypes for several of the scores. In particular, individuals with not optimal *GABAProductionPathways* have higher odds of IBS and its subtypes (IBS-C, IBS-D, and IBS-M). In addition, individuals with not optimal *LacticAcidProduction-Pathways*, *OxalateMetabolismPathways*, or *Sulfide-ProductionPathways* have higher odds of IBS-D. Finally, individuals with not optimal *MethanogenesisPathways* have higher odds of IBS-C, while at the same time,

individuals with not optimal *ButyrateProductionPathways* or *SulfideProductionPathways* have a lower odds of IBS-C.

The stratification of IBS and its subtypes through our data-driven gut pathway scores demonstrates the capability to leverage metatranscriptomics for wellness. Given these findings, we have employed the gut functional pathway scores as health insights within a large-scale health application. These pathway scores are used for nutritional recommendations described elsewhere [118]. Clinically, the microbiome is established as critically important for overall health and understanding the microbiome through evaluation of microbial functions (i.e., gene expression) could add substantial value to current diagnostic and treatment approaches. These pathways form the basis for understanding higher-level biological functions and for a range of future research.

Supplementary Materials: Figure S1: Landscape of score distribution;, Table S1: Control definitions for each score; Table S2: Mean Score Difference, P-value, and Effect Size for 4,922 total cases of IBS and IBS subtypes; Table S3: Odds Ratio and Confidence Intervals shown in Figure 2.

Author Contributions: Conceptualization, E.P., G.B.; Data curation, E.P., A.G., M.M.; Formal analysis, E.P., A.G., M.M., O.O.; Funding acquisition, M.V., G.B.; .
Investigation, E.P., A.G., M.M., C.J., L.H., M.V., G.B.; Methodology, E.P., A.G., M.M.; Project administration, G.B.; Resources, G.B.; Software, E.P., A.G., M.M., O.O., L.H.; Supervision, G.B.; Validation, C.J.; Visualization, E.P., A.G., M.M.; Writing – original draft, E.P., A.G., M.M., G.B.; Writing – review & editing, E.P., A.G., M.M., C.J., L.H., M.V., R.W., G.B.

Data Availability Statement: The raw data used in this study cannot be shared publicly due to privacy and legal reasons. However, if data is specifically requested, we may be able to share a summary and/or portions of the data. Researchers requiring more data for non-commercial purposes can request via: https://www.viomelifesciences.com/data-access. Viome may provide access to summary statistics through a Data Transfer Agreement that protects the privacy of participants' data.

Acknowledgements: We would like to thank Angel Janevski for leading data and analytics, which is responsible for computing scores and recommendations on a regular basis.

Conflicts of Interest: All authors are stockholders and either employees or paid advisors of Viome Inc, a commercial for-profit company.

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Supplementary Materials

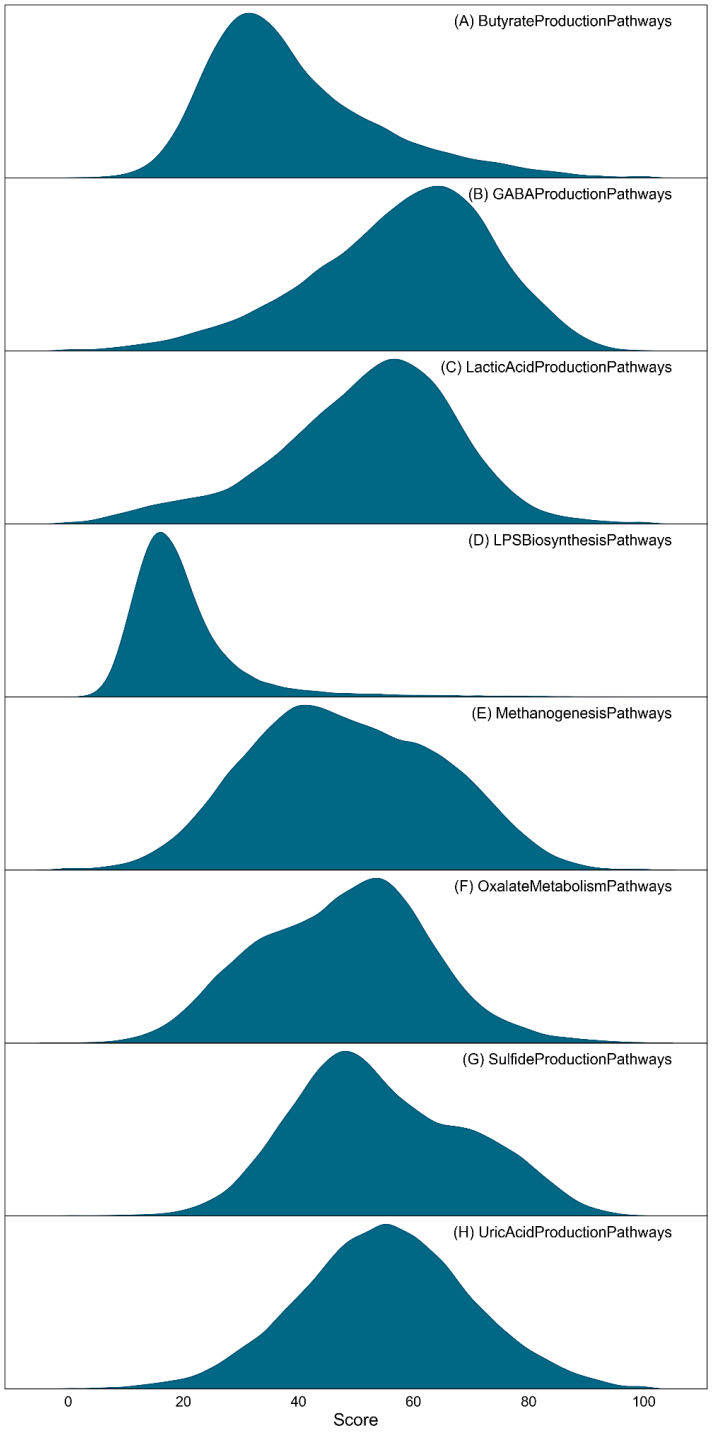

Figure S1. Landscape of score distribution. The distribution of eight functional pathway scores (A-H) in an independent cohort (*n* = 57, 195 samples). The functional score, represented as Principal Component 1 (PC1) rescaled to the development cohort for each sample, is expected to follow a Gaussian normal distribution. Some scores deviate significantly from this normal distribution, which can be attributed to missing molecular signatures in the reference cohort, resulting in extremely high or low scores. Scores exceeding 100 or falling below 0 were clipped.

Table S1. Control definitions for each score. The definition of "controls" is different for each score, where all diseases listed for each score were removed from the control pool, along with anyone who reported IBS or its subtypes (Figure 2 & Table S2). The count of comorbidities (*n*) is shown alongside the minimum size of the control pool (*x*) available for 1:5 matching, which was determined by subtracting the number of excluded cases (plus all IBS cases) from the size of the validation cohort (*n* = 57,195).

Score Name (*n* = comorbidity count; *x* = minimum control pool)	**Comorbidities excluded from controls**	**References**
ButyrateProductionPathways (*n* = 37 ; *x* = 35,441)	Acne, Atherosclerosis, Atopic dermatitis, *C. difficile* infection, Cardiovascular condition, Colon polyps, Colorectal cancer, Congestive heart failure, COPD, Coronary heart disease, Crohn's disease, Cystic acne, Depression, Dermatitis (Skin rashes or irritation), Dysglycemia / Irregular blood sugar, Eczema, Emphysema, GI inflammation, Gout, *H. pylori* infection, High lipids, Hypercholesterolemia, Hypertension, Inflammatory bowel disease, Insomnia, Leaky gut, Liver cirrhosis, Major depressive disorder, Osteoarthritis, Osteoporosis, Prediabetes, Psoriasis, Psoriatic arthritis, Rheumatoid arthritis, Type 1 diabetes, Type 2 diabetes, Ulcerative colitis	[119–145]
GABAProductionPathways (*n* = 17 ; *x* = 41,321)	Anxiety, Autism, Behavioral / Mood disorder, Colon polyps, Colorectal cancer, Crohn's disease, Depression, Dysmotility, Epilepsy, Inflammatory bowel disease, Irritable bowel syndrome-Diarrhea, Insomnia, Leaky gut, Metabolic syndrome, NAFLD, Type 1 diabetes, Type 2 diabetes, Ulcerative colitis	[146–158]
LacticAcidProductionPathways (*n* = 16 ; *x* = 45,641)	Chronic fatigue syndrome, Colon polyps, Colorectal cancer, Crohn's disease, Dysbiosis, Gastritis, Infections, Irritable bowel syndrome-Diarrhea, Inflammatory bowel disease, Insulin resistance, Ischemic colitis, Metabolic syndrome, Prediabetes, Short bowel syndrome, Type 2 diabetes, Ulcerative colitis	[89,159–172]
LPSBiosynthesisPathways (*n* = 39 ; *x* = 34,587)	Alcohol addiction, Allergies, ALS, Alzheimer's disease, Anxiety, Atherosclerosis, Autism, Cardiovascular condition, Celiac disease, Cognitive dysfunction / Cognitive impairment, Colon polyps, Colorectal cancer, Coronary heart disease, Crohn's disease, Depression, Dysbiosis, GI inflammation, HIV, Inflammatory bowel disease, Influenza, Insulin resistance, Kidney disease, Leaky gut, Liver cirrhosis, Metabolic syndrome, Mild cognitive impairment, NAFLD, Obesity, Osteoarthritis, Pancreatic Cancer, Pancreatitis, Parkinson's disease, Peripheral artery disease, Prediabetes, Rheumatoid arthritis, Sepsis, SIBO, Type 2 diabetes, Ulcerative colitis	[55,173–198]
MethanogenesisPathways (*n* = 32 ; *x* = 41,463)	Abdominal weight, Abnormal fasting glucose, Anorexia, Colon polyps, Colorectal cancer, Crohn's disease, Diverticulitis, Diverticulosis, Dysbiosis, Dysglycemia / Irregular blood sugar, Encopresis, Gastritis, Gastroparesis, GI inflammation, *H. pylori*, High lipids, Hypercholesterolemia, Infections, Irritable bowel syndrome-Constipation, Inflammatory bowel disease, Insulin resistance, Leaky gut, Metabolic syndrome, Multiple sclerosis, NAFLD, Obesity, Parkinson's disease, Prediabetes, SIBO, Type 1 diabetes, Type 2 diabetes, Ulcerative colitis	[111,199–237]
OxalateMetabolismPathways (*n* = 19 ; *x* = 40,095)	Abdominal weight, Cardiovascular condition, Colon polyps, Colorectal cancer, Coronary heart disease, Crohn's disease, Hashimoto's disease, Hypertension, Hyperthyroidism, Hypothyroidism, Inflammatory bowel disease, Kidney disease, Kidney stones, Obesity, Short bowel disease, Stroke, Thyroid cancer, Thyroid nodule(s), Ulcerative colitis	[238–249]
SulfideProductionPathways (*n* = 16 ; *x* = 48,016)	Colon polyps, Colorectal cancer, Crohn's disease, Diverticulitis, Diverticulosis, GI inflammation, *H. pylori* infection, Infections, Inflammatory bowel disease, Irritable bowel syndrome-Constipation, Irritable bowel syndrome-Diarrhea, Irritable bowel syndrome, Leaky gut, Parkinson's disease, SIBO, Ulcerative colitis	[250–256]
UricAcidProductionPathways (*n* = 14 ; *x* = 44,785)	Colon polyps, Colorectal cancer, Crohn's disease, Gout, Hypertension, Inflammatory bowel disease, Insulin resistance, Kidney disease, Kidney stones, Metabolic syndrome, Obesity, Prediabetes, Type 2 diabetes, Ulcerative colitis	[257–266]

Table S2. Mean Score Difference, P-value, and Effect Size for 4,922 total cases of IBS and IBS subtypes. Values represent ["mean case score" - "mean control score"]; IBS cases are the composite of IBS and all IBS subtypes while "control" definitions are score-specific (Table S1). P-values are shown in superscript on the Score Differences, with Effect Size (Cohen's D) in parentheses. $p \leq 0.05$ (*); $p \leq 0.01$ (**); $p \leq 0.001$ (***); not significant (ns). The maximum number of cases used in 1:5 case/control matching (*n*) are shown in each column. See Table S1 for the minimum size of the control pool available for 1:5 matching.

Score Name	**IBS** (max *n* = 4,922)	**IBS-C** (max *n* = 1,126)	**IBS-D** (max *n* = 695)	**IBS-M** (max *n* = 760)
ButyrateProductionPathways	-1.496*** (0.102)	1.375** (0.091)	-4.461*** (0.316)	-1.909*** (0.132)
GABAProductionPathways	-3.554*** (0.220)	-4.952*** (0.311)	-3.872*** (0.235)	-3.873*** (0.242)
LacticAcidProductionPathways	-1.976*** (0.127)	0.298^{ns} (0.019)	-4.789*** (0.315)	-2.128*** (0.138)
LPSBiosynthesisPathways	-0.719*** (0.073)	-1.109** (0.107)	-0.247^{ns} (0.023)	-0.619^{ns} (0.058)
MethanogenesisPathways	-1.711*** (0.105)	-4.089*** (0.257)	-1.396^{ns} (0.085)	-2.329*** (0.144)
OxalateMetabolismPathways	-1.327*** (0.090)	1.274** (0.089)	-3.185*** (0.214)	-1.592** (0.107)
SulfideProductionPathways	-0.156^{ns} (0.010)	2.134*** (0.147)	-1.947** (0.129)	-0.896^{ns} (0.061)
UricAcidProductionPathways	-2.480*** (0.164)	- 0.012^{ns} (0.001)	-4.675*** (0.310)	-2.287*** (0.148)

Table S3. Odds Ratio and Confidence Intervals shown in Figure 2. IBS cases are the composite of IBS and all IBS subtypes while "control" definitions are score-specific (Table S1). Values represent Odds Ratios. P-values are shown in superscript, with 95% Confidence Interval in parentheses. $p \leq 0.05$ (*); $p \leq 0.01$ (**); $p \leq 0.001$ (***); not significant (ns).

Score Name	**IBS** (max *n* = 4,922)	**IBS-C** (max *n* = 1,126)	**IBS-D** (max *n* = 695)	**IBS-M** (max *n* = 760)
ButyrateProductionPathways	1.3*** (1.2 - 1.5)	0.7* (0.6 - 0.9)	2.8*** (2.2 - 3.6)	1.4** (1.1 - 1.8)
GABAProductionPathways	1.7*** (1.5 - 1.8)	2.3*** (1.8 - 2.8)	1.7*** (1.4 - 2.2)	1.8*** (1.4 - 2.3)
LacticAcidProductionPathways	1.4*** (1.3 - 1.5)	1.0^{ns} (0.8 - 1.2)	2.2*** (1.7 - 2.8)	1.4* (1.1 - 1.8)
LPSBiosynthesisPathways	1.2** (1.1 - 1.3)	1.5** (1.2 - 1.8)	0.9^{ns} (0.7 - 1.2)	1.3^{ns} (1.0 - 1.7)
MethanogenesisPathways	1.2*** (1.1 - 1.4)	1.8*** (1.5 - 2.3)	1.3* (1.0 - 1.7)	1.3* (1.0 - 1.7)
OxalateMetabolismPathways	1.3*** (1.2 - 1.4)	0.8^{ns} (0.7 - 1.0)	1.7*** (1.3 - 2.3)	1.2^{ns} (1.0 - 1.6)
SulfideProductionPathways	1.1^{ns} (1.0 - 1.2)	0.8* (0.6 - 1.0)	1.5** (1.2 - 2.0)	1.2^{ns} (0.9 - 1.5)
UricAcidProductionPathways	1.5*** (1.4 - 1.6)	0.9^{ns} (0.7 - 1.1)	2.2*** (1.7 - 2.8)	1.3* (1.1 - 1.7)