

1 **Roux-Y Gastric Bypass and Sleeve Gastrectomy directly change gut microbiota**  
2 **composition independent of operation type**

3 Running title: Microbiota changes in bariatric surgery patients

4

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24

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26 **Abstract**

27 **Background**

28 Bariatric surgery in patients with morbid obesity, either through gastric sleeve  
29 gastrectomy or Roux-Y gastric bypass surgery, leads to sustainable weight loss,  
30 improvement of metabolic disorders and changes in the intestinal microbiota. Yet, the  
31 relationship between changes in gut microbiota, weight loss and the surgical  
32 procedure remains incompletely understood.

33 **Subjects/Methods**

34 We determined temporal changes in microbiota composition in 45 obese patients  
35 undergoing a crash diet followed by gastric sleeve gastrectomy ( $n= 22$ ) or Roux-Y  
36 gastric bypass ( $n= 23$ ). Intestinal microbiota composition was determined before  
37 intervention (baseline, S1), 2 weeks after a crash diet (S2), and 1 week (S3), 3 months  
38 (S4) and 6 months (S5) after surgery.

39 **Results**

40 Relative to S1, the microbial diversity index declined at S2 and S3 ( $p< 0.05$ ), and  
41 gradually returned to baseline levels at S5. The crash diet was associated with an  
42 increased abundance of Rikenellaceae and decreased abundances of  
43 Ruminococcaceae and Streptococcaceae ( $p< 0.05$ ). After surgery, at S3, the relative  
44 abundance of Bifidobacteriaceae had decreased (compared to the moment directly  
45 after the crash diet), whereas those of Streptococcaceae and Enterobacteriaceae had  
46 increased ( $p< 0.05$ ). Increased weight loss during the next 6 months was not  
47 associated without major changes in microbiota composition. Significant differences  
48 between both surgical procedures were not observed at any of the time points.

49 **Conclusions**

50 In conclusion, undergoing a crash diet and bariatric surgery were associated with an  
51 immediate but temporary decline in the microbial diversity, with immediate and  
52 permanent changes in microbiota composition, with no differences between patients  
53 undergoing gastric sleeve gastrectomy or Roux-Y gastric bypass surgery.

54

## 55 **Introduction**

56 Bariatric surgery is the only sustainable effective treatment for obesity <sup>1</sup>. Surgical  
57 procedures such as the Roux-Y Gastric bypass (RYGB) and the sleeve gastrectomy  
58 (SG) facilitate a 50-70% decrease in excess body weight and fat mass <sup>1</sup>. In addition,  
59 surgery leads to decreased caloric intake or malabsorption and to metabolic changes,  
60 such as an improved glucose metabolism, and is associated with a changed intestinal  
61 microbiota <sup>2-4</sup>. The role of altered host-microbial interactions in this process is  
62 incompletely understood <sup>1</sup>. Studies on the composition of the distal gut microbiota in  
63 obesity and after RYGB in humans and rodents yielded long lasting changes in types  
64 and ratio of enteric bacteria <sup>3, 5-8</sup>. Furthermore, transfer of the gut microbiota from  
65 RYGB-treated mice to non-operated, germ-free mice resulted in weight loss and  
66 decreased fat mass in the recipient animals <sup>5</sup>. These findings support a direct effect of  
67 the microbiota on weight and adiposity. Recently Liu *et al.* demonstrate using  
68 metagenomic shotgun sequencing that the abundance of glutamate-fermenting  
69 *Bacteriodes thetaiotaomicron* is decreased in obese Chinese individuals and  
70 glutamate levels are increased <sup>9</sup>. Weight loss by SG partially reversed metabolic and  
71 microbial alterations, including reduced abundance of *B. thetaiotaomicron* and  
72 increased serum glutamate <sup>9</sup>.

73 To further elucidate the results of the entire bariatric surgery procedure on the  
74 intestinal microbiota composition we investigated sequentially collected stool samples

75 from 45 morbid obese patients undergoing either RYGB or SG at five different time  
76 points before and after surgery.

77

## 78 **Subjects and Methods**

### 79 *Ethics Statement*

80 The study protocol was in accordance with the regulations of the Ethics Committee of  
81 Catharina Hospital Eindhoven.

82

### 83 *Study Design*

84 In this observational study patients with morbid obesity were recruited from the  
85 Catharina Hospital Eindhoven out-patient obesity clinic between September 2014 and  
86 November 2014. All 45 patients fulfilled the criteria for bariatric surgery and were  
87 screened before surgery for eligibility by a team including a surgeon, dietician and a  
88 psychologist. Two weeks before the planned surgery, patients were subjected to a  
89 crash diet consisting of 500 calories a day for 2 weeks. Type of surgery was  
90 determined based on clinical criteria and shared decision making between surgeon  
91 and patient. Reasons to refrain from RYGB were medication dependence, increased  
92 operation risk or super obesity. A reason to refrain from SG was gastroesophageal  
93 reflux disease. During surgery, patients received 1 g cefazolin antibiotic prophylaxis  
94 intravenously. After hospitalization, general practitioners managed adjustments of  
95 insulin, oral diabetics and other medication in the home setting. Patients visited out-  
96 patient clinic at 3, 6 and 12 months for evaluation and will remain in follow up for 5  
97 years.

98

99 *Sample collection and DNA extraction.*

100 Stool samples (Sterilin specimen container, Thermo-Fisher) were gathered at the out-  
101 patient clinic or at patient homes. Samples were always stored in the freezer and  
102 collected at the homes of the patients using dry-ice and stored at the hospital at -80°C.  
103 Sample were collected at 5 different time points; before the start of the crash diet (S1),  
104 2 weeks after the crash diet (S2), and 1 week (S3), 3 months (S4) and 5 to 6 months  
105 after surgery (S5).

106 Total bacterial DNA from feces samples was isolated according to Godon *et al.* <sup>10</sup>.  
107 When isolated DNA contained PCR inhibitors (20% of the samples random  
108 distributed over the time points), samples were submitted to an extra step of  
109 isopropanol precipitation and column purification with QiAamp stool mini kit  
110 (Qiagen). DNA was stored at -20°C prior to further analysis.

111

112 *16S rRNA gene sequencing strategy and analysis*

113 A 469 bp encompassing the V3 and V4 hypervariable regions of the 16S rRNA gene  
114 was amplified and sequenced using the Illumina MiSeq Reagent Kit v3 (600-cycle) on  
115 an Illumina MiSeq instrument according to Fadrosh *et al.* <sup>11</sup>. Negative controls, buffer  
116 controls were included in the DNA extraction, amplification and sequencing protocol  
117 to monitor for potential contamination. A total of 3 amplicon pools were sequenced,  
118 generating 8.9, 7.8 and 14.4 (mean of 10.3) million total reads. These 2x300 bp  
119 paired-end reads were pre-processed as follows. The first 12 bp of each paired-end  
120 containing the index sequences were extracted and afterwards concatenated to dual-

121 index barcodes of 24 bp specific for each read-pair and sample. Paired reads were  
122 merged, as an overlap of about 90 bp was expected, using FLASH (version 1.2.11) <sup>12</sup>.  
123 Subsequently, these merged reads were de-multiplexed using the  
124 `split_libraries_fastq.py` script from and analyzed by the QIIME microbial community  
125 analysis pipeline (version 1.9.1) <sup>13</sup>. Quality filtering was also performed during this  
126 step, truncating reads with an average PHRED quality score of 20 or less. After  
127 removal of the barcodes, heterogeneity spacers, and primer sequences about 19.8  
128 million sequences were left with a mean length of 410 bp (median length of 405). The  
129 obtained sequences with a minimum of 97% similarity were assigned to operational  
130 taxonomic units (OTUs) using QIIME's open-reference OTU picking workflow  
131 (`pick_open_reference_otus.py`). This workflow was carried out using USEARCH  
132 (version 6.1.544) <sup>14</sup> for OTU picking, in addition to detection and removal of chimeric  
133 sequences. The obtained OTU sequences were aligned to the Greengenes 16S rRNA  
134 gene database (`gg_13_8_otus`), followed by removal of OTUs represented by less than  
135 0.005% of the total number of sequences. The generated OTU table and phylogenetic  
136 tree were used for assessing alpha- and beta-diversity using QIIME's  
137 `core_diversity_analyses.py` workflow with a rarefaction depth of 20001 sequences.  
138 The weighted UniFrac distance was used to calculate beta-diversity of the samples,  
139 while the shannon index was used for the alpha-diversity. For Principal Component  
140 Analysis (PCA) R 3.5.0 in an environment of RStudio 1.1.383 (RStudio Team,  
141 Boston, MA) <sup>15</sup> was employed, using `zCompositions`, `clr` transformation and `ggplot`  
142 R packages <sup>16-18</sup>.

143

144 *Statistical analysis*

145 Microbiota changes between time points and operation types were investigated using  
146 ANCOM<sup>19</sup> in R 3.3.3<sup>15</sup>. Changes in the clinical parameters (BMI, vitamin D, vitamin  
147 B6, cholesterol, bilirubin, glycated hemoglobin (HbA1c), iron, ferritin and folate)  
148 between baseline and 6 months after surgery was analyzed by applying t-test in Prism  
149 GraphPad (version 7.0). Associations between changes in total read counts at family  
150 level (at baseline versus 6 months after surgery) and changes in patient characteristics  
151 (at baseline versus 6 months after surgery) were investigated using a linear regression  
152 model. To eliminate possible confounding effects, age and sex were included as  
153 covariates. For these analyses, changes in total read counts were used as outcome,  
154 whereas changes in patient characteristics were used as predictor (model:  
155  $\text{change\_in\_read\_counts} \sim \beta_1 \cdot \text{age} + \beta_2 \cdot \text{sex} + \beta_3 \cdot \text{change\_in\_patient\_characteristic}$ ).  
156 For association analysis R 3.5.0 in an environment of RStudio 1.1.383 (RStudio  
157 Team, Boston, MA) was employed<sup>15</sup>. Results are presented using pheatmap package  
158 (<https://CRAN.R-project.org/package=pheatmap>). For statistical testing we used false  
159 discovery rates (FDRs) correct for multiple comparisons, and an FDR- adjusted p-  
160 value < 0.05 was considered as significant<sup>20</sup>.

161

## 162 **Results**

163 *RYGB and SG resulted in significant decrease of BMI in all patients.*

164 In this study, 45 Caucasian Dutch patients were included with an average age of 43  
165 years, 36 (84%) being female, 11 (24%) using proton pump inhibitors and 4 (9%)  
166 having type 2 Diabetes Mellitus at baseline (Table 1). After a crash diet, 22 patients  
167 underwent SG and 23 underwent RYGB. At baseline the mean BMI was 42.9 (+/-  
168 6.56) and 43 (+/-4.13) for patients undergoing RYGB and SG, respectively. At 6

169 months after the procedure BMI declined to 30.81 (+/-5.35) and 31.52 (+/-3.86),  
170 respectively, with no significant difference based on surgery type (Table 1).

171

172 *Crash diet reduces microbial alpha diversity, which is restored to baseline levels 6*  
173 *months after surgery, irrespective of surgery type.*

174 In total 221 fecal samples were collected, with 4 samples missing from 4 unique times  
175 points from 4 different patients. Using a pre-defined cut-off value of 20001 reads, 220  
176 samples could be analyzed.

177 The initial crash diet had a stronger effect on total microbiota diversity as the Shannon  
178 diversity index declined from 4.5 at baseline (S1) to 4.0 after the crash diet ( $p < 0.05$ )  
179 (S2) and then gradually returned to 4.5 at 3 (S4) and 6 months (S5) after surgery  
180 (Figure 1a). Differences in diversity are reflected by an initial decrease and  
181 subsequent rise in numbers of distinct microbial OTUs. At baseline, 3 months and 6  
182 months after surgery more than 500 OTUs were identified, whereas after the crash  
183 diet and at 1 week after surgery this number was reduced to below 400 OTUs (Figure  
184 1b).

185 In Principle Component Analysis (PCA) (Figure 1c), patients at baseline (S1) and  
186 after crash diet (S2) are more similar to each other when compared to the times points  
187 after the surgery (S3, S4, S5), which cluster together further apart.

188

189 *Distinct microbial changes appear directly after crash diet, but are replaced by*  
190 *persistent distinct changes shortly after surgery.*



191 Significant changes in total relative abundance of specific families in the different  
192 time points were observed (Figure 2h). After the crash diet (S2) there was a  
193 significant reduction in relative abundance of 2 microbial families, Streptococcaceae  
194 and Ruminococcaceae (Figure 2a and d), and a significant increase in 1 family,  
195 Rikenellaceae (Figure 2e). Subsequent comparison of the microbial composition pre-  
196 surgery (S2) and 1-week post-surgery (S3) revealed a significant increase in the  
197 relative abundance of Streptococcaceae and Enterobacteriaceae families (Figure 2a  
198 and b) and a decrease in Bifidobacteriaceae, which persisted until 6 months post-  
199 surgery (S5) (Figure 2c). In these 6 months (at S5) microbiota complexity was  
200 restored (Figure 1a and b), which when compared with 1 week after surgery (S3)  
201 coincided with increased relative abundance of low abundance families  
202 Veillonellaceae and the Clostridiales order with no further family classification  
203 (Figure 2f and g).

204 When RYGB and SG surgeries were analyzed separated, no significant differences in  
205 microbiota composition based on beta diversity and relative abundance was observed  
206 at baseline (S1) (Figure 3a), 1 week (S3) (Figure 3b) or 6 months after surgery (S5)  
207 (Figure 3c) between patients that underwent either SG and RYGB (Figure 3d).

208

#### 209 *Significant associations between microbiota changes and clinical markers*

210 Clinical parameters in patients were analyzed at baseline and 6 months after the  
211 surgery. Besides weight loss, serum levels of vitamin D, B6, cholesterol, bilirubin,  
212 HbA1c, iron, ferritin and folate improved 6 months after surgery when compared to  
213 baseline (FDR-adjusted,  $p < 0.05$ , Table 1).

214 These changes were associated to overall differences in microbial abundance in  
215 relation to the changes in clinical parameters at S5 versus S1, which are highlighted in  
216 Figure 4. Significant associations were only found in low abundance families.  
217 Decreased bilirubin level was associated with and Prevotellaceae, Bacteroidales and  
218 Peptococcaceae taxa; and increased iron level was associated with Pasteurellaceae. In  
219 addition, a decreased HbA1c was associated with Coriobacteriaceae and Clostridiales  
220 taxa The most pronounced measured effects in the dataset was a negative association  
221 between Prevotellaceae, Veillonellaceae, Streptococcaceae, Bifidobacteriaceae and  
222 Enterobacteriaceae taxa in relation to decreased serum cholesterol levels, whereas  
223 most pronounced positive associations were found between Lachnospiraceae and  
224 Coriobacteriaceae taxa in relation to decreased cholesterol levels (Figure 4). Yet,  
225 these associations were not statistically significant after FDR adjustment (Figure 4).

226

## 227 **Discussion**

228 This study is novel in the fact that it compares microbiota profiles before and very  
229 shortly after bariatric surgery with subsequent follow-up profiles. We describe the  
230 sequential impact of a crash diet followed by either RYGB or SG surgery, resulting in  
231 progressive weight loss and changes in the gut microbiota composition. Several other  
232 studies report sequential sampling of patients after bariatric surgery, but none of the  
233 studies define timing of the baseline sample in relation to a crash diet<sup>3, 9, 16, 21-23</sup>, and,  
234 therefore, renders the relative impact of the different measures in the bariatric  
235 procedure difficult to dissect. In addition, this study is unique in that a very early  
236 postsurgical sampling time point is included. Apart from substantial weight loss and  
237 improvements in clinical parameters, as reported by others, bariatric surgery induces  
238 long-lasting changes in microbiota composition in most patients. The most apparent

239 immediate change in microbiota composition occurred after the crash diet, with a  
240 concurrent reduction in alpha diversity, whereas surgery was associated with early  
241 and sustained replacement of distinct bacterial taxa and restoration of the diversity.

242 Although significant microbial changes are identified in the gut microbiota of  
243 bariatric surgery patients, at 6 months after surgery the total microbial diversity was  
244 similar to microbial diversity measured at baseline. This sudden decline in alpha  
245 diversity probably reflects a severe stress on the human microbiota by a crash diet,  
246 with a significant change in catabolic state <sup>24</sup>. Persisting post-surgery microbiota  
247 changes suggest adaptation to anatomic and physiologic changes, such as reduced  
248 acid production, increased oxygen content, altered bile acid concentrations delivered  
249 to the colon, induced by the surgery. Previously reported effects of bariatric surgery  
250 on microbiota diversity have ranged from an increase in total diversity <sup>25,26</sup> to absence  
251 of change and even a decrease in alpha diversity <sup>27</sup>. We suspect that baseline sampling  
252 in relation to crash diet may vary between studies, and might contribute to the  
253 reported differences between studies.

254

255 Besides a stable bacterial alpha diversity after surgery, we observed profound  
256 differences after each consecutive intervention on bacterial taxa composition.

257 The crash diet immediately resulted in an increase in the relative abundance of  
258 Bifidobacteriaceae and decrease of Streptococcaceae, whereas the opposite effect was  
259 observed after surgery; an increase in abundance of Streptococcaceae and decline in  
260 Bifidobacteriaceae that persisted for at least 6 months. In addition to the observed  
261 increased abundance of Veillonellaceae may reflect survival of oral microbiota into  
262 the intestine. Observed persistent increase in Enterobacteriaceae after surgery,  
263 confirms previous sustained changes reported in humans and animal models (rats),

264 associated with increased pH<sup>7, 24, 28, 29</sup>. Other main differences, exposure to  
265 undigested nutrients and biliopancreatic enzymes, may play important roles in the  
266 microbial composition, intestinal permeability and intestinal adaptation<sup>30</sup>. Since  
267 increased intestinal permeability is associated with inflammation and reductions in  
268 alpha diversity, which is also associated with obesity, it is questionable whether  
269 restoration of alpha diversity to baseline level may also reflect persistent  
270 inflammation in the post-surgery state at 6 months, which has been previously related to  
271 increase in Enterobacteriaceae<sup>16</sup>. This corresponds to the observed higher alpha  
272 diversity of fecal samples from a healthy normal weight cohort compared to the  
273 although improved, yet lower diversity of postoperative patients<sup>16</sup>.

274

275 Although others observed microbiota changes only after RYGB<sup>5</sup>, here we observed  
276 this in both surgery types. This suggests that despite the 2 procedures result in distinct  
277 anatomic differences, this did not seem to influence the post-surgery changes in  
278 relative abundance of Bifidobacteriaceae, Streptococcaceae and Enterobacteriaceae  
279 observed amongst both patient groups and which were similar for both types of  
280 surgery. Interestingly, unlike Liu *et al.*<sup>9</sup> and Ilhan *et al.*<sup>31</sup> both patients groups here  
281 after surgery develop comparable weight loss irrespective of surgery type, this may  
282 explain why we find similar changes in gut microbiota composition. Also baseline  
283 characteristics did not differ significantly. Moreover, we suggest that bariatric surgery  
284 in itself, unlike crash diet, results in an altered long-lasting composition of the  
285 microbiota.

286 Although a significant association with changed clinical parameters between baseline  
287 and 6 months after surgery was lacking, the relative abundance of Bifidobacteriaceae,  
288 Streptococcaceae and Enterobacteriaceae taxa changed significantly shortly after

289 surgery. This sudden adjustment further confirms that the altered postoperative  
290 microbiota more likely reflects surgery induced effects, rather than improved clinical  
291 parameters<sup>16, 23, 31</sup>. We observed a significant association between increased serum  
292 bilirubin level and decreased relative abundance of Bacteroidales, Peptococcaceae and  
293 Prevotellaceae taxa in this dataset. The abundance of Bacteroidales in the gut  
294 microbiota could contribute to the increase in bilirubin level, since *Bacteroides*  
295 *fragilis*, which is part of Bacteroidales taxa, is one of the bacterial species described to  
296 be able to metabolize bilirubin in the gut<sup>32, 33</sup>. In addition, a decreased HbA1c was  
297 found significantly associated with decreased Coriobacteriaceae and increased  
298 Clostridiales taxa. Nevertheless, the exact meaning of changes of these low  
299 abundance taxa is unknown.

300 This study failed to confirm the suggested relationship between increased abundance  
301 of Firmicutes and Bacteroidetes and obesity<sup>34, 35</sup>, as the relative abundance of the  
302 family members of these phyla remained stable before and after surgery, despite  
303 significant weight loss. In addition, other studies described that *Faecalibacterium* (*F.*  
304 *prausnitzii*) was assumed to play a role in inflammation and glucose homeostasis in  
305 obesity with a reduced relative abundance after RYGB surgery<sup>3, 8, 36, 37</sup>. In our study,  
306 a decreased abundance of the Ruminococcaceae family, to which *F. prausnitzii*  
307 belongs, was observed after the crash diet, yet this change did not sustain after  
308 surgery.

309

310 In conclusion, here we illustrate that temporal sampling of bariatric surgery patients  
311 with subsequent microbiota analysis can lead to increased insights into the relative  
312 contribution of interventions on stability and composition of the microbiota. We show  
313 that a crash diet invoked profound temporary changes in total microbiota diversity and

314 composition, yet surgery precluded early fixed changes of microbial composition and  
315 restoration of the microbial diversity that likely contribute to weight loss.

316

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319 conceived and designed the experiments: ML, DA, MJMB, ACF, HLL. Performed the  
320 experiments: ML, DA, APAH, JG, MCV. Analyzed the data: FLP, MRCR, CMH,  
321 HWU, RMB. Wrote the paper: FLP, ML, CMH, HWU, MRCR, DA, RMB, APAH,  
322 MCV, JG, MJMB, ACF, RJLW, HLL.

323

### 324 **Competing interests**

325 The authors declare no competing financial interests.

326

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490 **Figures Legends**

491 **Figure 1.** Observed and estimated richness of gut microbiota at different time points  
492 during the bariatric surgery procedure. (A). Shannon diversity index estimated a  
493 decrease in bacterial richness at S2 and S3. (B). Rarefaction curves showed a  
494 reduction in bacterial richness at S2 and S3. (C). Principal component analysis (PCA)  
495 plot of similarity between the samples; each dot represents 1 sample, each color a  
496 different time point. S1. before surgery (red); S2. after 2 weeks of crash diet (orange);  
497 S3. 1 week after surgery (yellow); S4. 3 months after surgery (light blue); S5. 6  
498 months after surgery (dark blue).

499

500 **Figure 2.** Relative abundance of bacterial families in the gut microbiota at the five  
501 time points analyzed. (A-G). Boxplots show the average relative abundance of 7  
502 families that significantly changed between 2 different time points. (A).  
503 Streptococcaceae. (B). Enterobacteriaceae. (C). Bifidobacteriaceae. (D).  
504 Ruminococcaceae. (E). Rikenellaceae. (F). Veillonellaceae. (G).  
505 O\_Clostridiales\_f\_others. H. Relative abundance of all families identified at the  
506 different time points. Significant families are represented in the same color. Asterisk  
507 (in red) indicates significant fold change differences ( $p < 0,05$ ) analyzed by ANCOM.

508

509 **Figure 3.** (A-C). Principal coordinate analysis (PCoA) plots comparing beta diversity  
510 of Sleeve Gastrectomy (SG) versus Roux-Y Gastric bypass (RYGB) surgery at  
511 baseline (S1) (A) 1 week after surgery (S3) (B) and 6 months after surgery (S5) (C).  
512 SG is indicated in red, RYGB is indicated in blue (D). Relative abundance of bacterial  
513 families in the gut microbiota at the five time points analyzed in SG versus RYGB  
514 surgery.

515 **Figure 4.** Association between clinical parameters and family taxa calculated based  
516 on the difference between 6 months after surgery (S6) and baseline (S1). The  
517 significant association (false discovery rate (FDR) adjusted p-value<0.05) is indicated  
518 with a “x”. The red color indicates positive effect and the blue color negative effect.  
519 HbA1c, glycated hemoglobin; VitD, vitamin D; VitB6, vitamin B6.







