

What's your gut instinct?

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CMI researchers launch public forum to encourage citizen scientists to ask questions and share insights that will help them understand the gut microbiome. Credit: University of California - San Diego

It's no secret that diet, exercise, medicine usage, and other habits affect your health and lifestyle, but how they do so is different for everyone. The Internet is filled with opinions on the matter. A quick Google search on "how do diet, exercise, medicine usage, and other habits affect your health and lifestyle" yields more than 3,000,000 results! A new project

at UC San Diego has set out to help alleviate some of the confusion by creating an educational platform for people to ask and answer gut health-related questions.

A collaboration between UC San Diego Center for Microbiome Innovation director Rob Knight's [American Gut Project](#) and the UC San Diego Design Lab, researchers have created a platform that encourages citizen scientists to provide contextual insights that are accessible to doctors and researchers who study the gut microbiome. The project, appropriately named "[Gut Instinct](#)" (currently in beta version), houses online lectures about how diet, antibiotics and other factors might influence the microbiome, and training modules to teach people about asking useful questions. Gut Instinct is now open for anyone to use and share their insights at gutinstinct.ucsd.edu.

"By using Gut Instinct, not only do you learn about the gut microbiome, but you help scientists get a deeper look at the data by providing specific insights from your personal experience that cannot be collected in the lab," said Vineet Pandey, computer science graduate student and the lead on the project.

Currently, samples from citizen scientists all over the world (stool, skin, oral, environmental, etc.) are received, sequenced and analyzed by the American Gut Project with a goal of building a map of the human microbiome. The database of [microbiome](#) sequences and associated (anonymous) host metadata are open-source.

"Gut Instinct allows American Gut researchers to tap into people's life experiences and make correlations that can help improve our understanding of the [gut microbiome](#)," said Pandey.

Once logged into the platform, a curious citizen scientist receives a quick tour before submitting a question to the "gut board", where it is

open for discussion.

"Sharing insights as specific questions makes the content easy to parse," said Pandey. "Moving forward, we want to work with participants who have certain ailments, like Inflammatory Bowel Disease or Irritable Bowel Syndrome. We hypothesize that these specific groups will have specific insights, and they will be highly motivated to act as citizen scientists."

In the near future, Pandey hopes to add infrastructure that enables people to design and run their own experiments that test their "gut instincts."

Provided by University of California - San Diego

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