

# Gut Bugs in Autism

## January 2024 Newsletter

As a new year begins, the Gut Bugs Team want to extend our best wishes to all of you, our valued participants in the Gut Bugs in Autism trial. We are incredibly grateful for your commitment and support to make this study happen.

### ***Reflecting on Our Achievements***

Over the past year, we have achieved significant milestones in our quest to understand the intricate relationship between gut health and the microbiome in autism. We are happy to share that we have successfully enrolled 50 Autistic individuals with gut issues across New Zealand. This is 50% of our study target. The treatment capsules have been well-tolerated and the overall feedback from our participants has been positive.

### ***Next Steps: Recruitment and Outreach***

Looking ahead, our goal for the next month is to enroll another 20 participants. If you know any Autistic people who might be interested in participating, we would be very appreciative if you could share information about our study with them ([gutbugsaugism@auckland.ac.nz](mailto:gutbugsaugism@auckland.ac.nz)).

### ***Meet the Gut Bugs Team***

Behind the scenes, our dedicated Gut Bugs Team has been working hard to ensure the success of this study. In this newsletter, we introduce you to some of our incredible team members, many of whom you may not have met before.

### ***Educational Resources***

Last November, we hosted an informative Autism Research webinar, where we delved into some of the more recent research on health and education for autistic individuals. If you missed the live session, you can watch its recording on Altogether Autism's YouTube channel ([click here](#)).

### ***Participant Insights***

We are also excited to share with you some encouraging feedback from participants and their support network who are involved in the study. Your stories and experiences are a constant source of inspiration and motivation for our Team!

Without your contribution and the time you have dedicated to our study, none of this would be possible. On behalf of our Gut Bugs Team and the Autistic community, we thank you for your support and generosity! Together, let's continue to advance autism research and improve the health and wellbeing of Autistics in New Zealand.

Wishing you a happy new year!

The Gut Bugs Team



# Meet the Team

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## **Prof Wayne Cutfield**

### *Principle Investigator*

Wayne is a pediatric endocrinologist with an extensive history in clinical trials and a special interest in microbiome therapies.



## **Prof Justin O'Sullivan**

### *Principle Investigator*

Justin is a molecular microbiologist with expertise in autism genetics and analysis of large microbiome datasets.



## **Dr Ruth Monk**

### *Autism Advisor & Research Fellow*

Ruth is an experienced research scientist and our invaluable autistic advisor who helps us make sure our research best serves the autistic community.



## **Dr Taygen Edwards**

### *Project Manager*

Taygen is a research scientist and project manager who handles the meticulous planning and coordination of our study.



## **Dr Brooke Wilson**

### *Postdoctoral Fellow*

Brooke is a molecular microbiologist who helps prepare the treatment capsules and studies their impact on the microbes living in your gut.



## **Dr Ben Albert**

### *Paediatrician & Senior Research Fellow*

Ben is a pediatric endocrinologist and experienced research scientist who specialises in childhood health and development.



## **Dr José Derraik**

### *Advisor & Trial Statistician*

José has extensive experience in clinical trial design and analysis, with a key role in helping us understand possible treatment effects.



## **Marysia Depczynski**

### *Research Nurse*

Marysia is our lovely research nurse responsible for carrying out all of the assessments during your study visits.



## **Frankie Day**

### *PhD Student*

Frankie is studying the small chemicals produced by our gut microbes and their effects on our health and wellbeing.



## **Dr Hiran Thabrew**

### *Psychiatrist*

Hiran is a psychiatrist at Starship Children's Hospital with a special interest in autism and mental health.



## **Dr Theo Portlock**

### *Research Fellow*

Theo is a data scientist specializing in artificial intelligence (AI) tools that can help us identify which microbes are linked to gut symptoms in autism and their resolution.

# Study Feedback

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*“I really appreciate having the opportunity to be a part of this study as my gut problems have affected me my entire life and it will be good to hopefully get some reprieve. Even if it doesn’t work I will have been immensely grateful and proud to have assisted.”*



*“My son is in this study. They are so lovely. They are not looking to “cure” autism. It is very common for people on the autistic spectrum to have gut issues. My son has had severe constipation all his life. He jumped at the opportunity to take part of the study. I don't like all the therapies that claim to “cure” autism.”*

*“Thank you for everything you’re doing and for allowing me to participate. Thank you for your accommodations and support, for the gift card koha, and the DXA scan and doctor info and everything else, including and especially the point of the trial itself.”*

