

Shiftwork, functional bowel symptoms, and the microbiome (#57966)

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Shiftwork, functional bowel symptoms, and the microbiome

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Background. There are about 15 million Americans working full-time on evening, night, or rotating shifts. Between 48% and 81.9% of those working rotating or night shifts report abdominal pain, constipation, diarrhea and other symptoms of functional bowel disorders. The basis for this high prevalence of functional bowel disorders, including irritable bowel syndrome (IBS), among shift workers is unknown. Animal studies, however, suggest that circadian disruption, similar to that in shift workers, may contribute to the development of GI complaints among shift workers by altering the composition and normal diurnal rhythmicity of the resident intestinal microbes .

Methods. Fifty-one full time staff nurses who worked either 12-hour day or night shifts completed demographic information, and the Rome III IBS module. They also collected two samples of gut microbiota before the beginning and at the end of their last work shift on day 14, using validated field-tested methods consistent with the Human Microbiome Project. After DNA extraction, 16S rRNA sequencing and assignment to the genus level was completed, samples were then compared to determine if there were 1) differences in the diversity and profile of the microbiome by shift type; 2) if there were differences in the microbiome by time of day for collection; and 3) whether there were differences in the diversity and profile of the microbiome of nurses with IBS and those without IBS.

Results. There were no differences in alpha or beta diversity of gut microbiota when specimens from day and night shift nurses were compared. There were however marginal differences in beta diversity when specimens collected at the beginning and end of the shifts were compared, with seven OTUs being differentially abundant when collected from day shift workers in the evening. There were also three OTUs to be differentially abundant in participants reporting IBS symptoms.

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Abstract

Background. There are about 15 million Americans working full-time on evening, night, or rotating shifts. Between 48% and 81.9% of those working rotating or night shifts report abdominal pain, constipation, diarrhea and other symptoms of functional bowel disorders. The basis for this high prevalence of functional bowel disorders, including irritable bowel syndrome (IBS), among shift workers is unknown. Animal studies, however, suggest that circadian disruption, similar to that in shift workers, may contribute to the development of GI complaints among shift workers by altering the composition and normal diurnal rhythmicity of the resident intestinal microbes

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35 **Methods.** Fifty-one full time staff nurses who worked either 12-hour day or night shifts
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41 in the diversity and profile of the microbiome by shift type; 2) if there were differences in
42 the microbiome by time of day for collection; and 3) whether there were differences in
43 the diversity and profile of the microbiome of nurses with IBS and those without IBS.

44

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47 marginal differences in beta diversity when specimens collected at the beginning and
48 end of the shifts were compared, with seven OTUs being differentially abundant when
49 collected from day shift workers in the evening. There were also three OTUs to be
50 differentially abundant in participants reporting IBS symptoms.

51

52 **Introduction**

53

54 There are about 15 million Americans working full-time on evening, night, or rotating
55 shifts, or other irregular employer-arranged schedules; 4.7% on evening shifts, 3.2% on
56 night shifts, 3.1% on irregular schedules, and 2.5% on rotating shifts (United States
57 Department of Labor Bureau of Labor Statistics 2005). Night shift work is associated
58 with increased mortality, higher risk of cardiovascular disease, cancer, diabetes,

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hypertension, chronic fatigue, sleep problems and higher body weight (Gu 2015; Jia 2013; Myers 2015; Pan 2011; Rajaratnam 2011; Vyas 2012) Night and rotating shift workers also report a higher prevalence of Irritable Bowel Syndrome (IBS), abdominal pain, constipation and diarrhea than do day shift workers (Caruso 2004; Knutsson 2010; Nojkov 2010; Wells 2012). In fact, between 48% and 81.9% of those working rotating or night shifts report abdominal pain, constipation, diarrhea and other symptoms of functional bowel disorders (Nojkov 2010; Saberi 2010).

The basis for this high prevalence of functional bowel disorders, including IBS, among shift workers is unknown. However, some studies suggest that inappropriate nutrition or irregularity in the timing of meals (Bilski 2006; Lowen 2010), and psychological disorders (Zhen 2006) may contribute to the high prevalence of functional bowel symptoms among workers on rotating or night shifts.

Other studies strongly suggest that sleep deprivation or sleep disturbances are associated with the presence and severity of functional bowel symptoms reported by resident physicians and nurses (Jarrett 2000; Saberi 2010; Wells 2012). Moreover, animal studies suggest that circadian disruption, similar to that in shift workers, contributes to the development of GI complaints among shift workers by altering the composition and normal diurnal rhythmicity of the resident intestinal microbes (De Bacquer 2009). Interestingly, gut microbiota community composition and diversity are malleable and sensitive to changes in diet and other environmental factors (Voigt 2014), including activity and sleep patterns. For example, Thaïss and colleagues (Thaïss 2014)

“jet lagged” a group of mice by subjecting them to an 8-hour advance for three days before allowing them to revert to their usual schedule for three more days, then subjecting them to another 8 hour advance for three days. Mice exposed to 4 weeks of this schedule lost their usual pattern of physical activity, and consumed food at irregular intervals. Significantly, this environmentally induced disruption of daily activity patterns (jet lag schedule) was associated with a loss of diurnal rhythmicity of microbiota composition in mice.

Thaiss and colleagues (Thaiss 2014) also found similar changes in human microbiota composition in two volunteers who flew from the US to Israel (an 8-10 hour advance). Samples collected at baseline (one day pre-flight), during jet lag (one day after landing), and during recovery (2 weeks after landing) showed rapid changes in the composition of the microbiota. During jet lag (the first 24-hours after landing), there was a higher relative representation of Firmicutes, which reversed upon recovery from jet lag (2 weeks later). Although some studies have demonstrated no differences in composition of the gut microbiome when samples from lean and obese individuals were compared (Ley 2006; Turnbaugh 2009), other studies in humans have demonstrated that Firmicutes are associated with a higher propensity for obesity and metabolic disease (Finucane 2014; Ley 2006), conditions that are more common in night and rotating shift workers (De Bacquer 2009; Suwazono 2008).

Finally, multiple studies have linked reduced microbial diversity and richness in microbial communities to IBS symptoms. For example, Krogius-Kurikka and

colleagues.(Krogus-Kurikka 2009) reported that fecal samples from patients with diarrhea-predominant IBS were enriched with Proteobacteria and Firmicutes but had reduced Actinobacteria and Bacteroidetes compared to healthy controls. Other studies (Bhattarai Y. 2017; Salonen 2010) have shown an increase in the Firmicutes-to-Bacteroidetes-ratio, a decrease in some types of Firmicutes families (Lactobacilli, Faecalibacterium) and the Actinobacteria population (Bifidobacteria, Collinsella), and an increase in some Firmicutes families (Veillonella, Streptococci, and Ruminococcus spp.) and in Proteobacteria (Enterobacteriaceae spp.). In addition, low microbial richness, an absence of Methanobacteriales, and enrichment with Bacteroides enterotypes are associated with more severe IBS symptoms (Tap 2017). Not only is the composition of the gut microbiota altered in patients with IBS, these imbalances in the microbial community or dysbiosis, occur more frequently in patients with IBS compared to healthy individuals. Reduced diversity was observed in nearly three-fourths of the IBS patients studied by Casén and colleagues (Casén 2015) compared to 16% in normal individuals (Collins 2014; Jeffery 2012; Karantosos 2010).

While these studies suggest that shiftwork alters gut microbiota and that alterations in gut microbiota are common in patients with IBS, they do not demonstrate whether these alterations are associated with the somatic symptoms experienced by many rotating and night shift workers. Therefore, the present study is designed as the initial step in determining if there are differences in 1) composition and diversity of the microbiome of night shift workers compared to day shift workers; and 2) the composition and diversity of microbiome among night shift workers experiencing functional bowel symptoms (e.g.,

bloating, lower abdominal pain, constipation and diarrhea) compared to night shift workers not experiencing functional bowel symptoms.

Materials & Methods

Subjects

Participants in this study included 51 full-time staff nurses who worked 12-hour day or night shifts at a large university hospital. Registered nurses were eligible to participate if they were between the ages of 18 and 65 and did not report a history of inflammatory bowel disease (e.g., Crohn's disease or ulcerative colitis) or other chronic disorder affecting the GI track (e.g., GI cancer). Those with recent antibiotic exposure were asked to delay their enrollment in the study for two weeks.

As expected, the sample was predominantly female (96%), with a mean age of 32.9 ± 10.0 years and a range of 21-59 years. Just under half of the participants reported working straight day shifts (47%), with the remainder of the sample working either straight night shifts (51%) or rotating shifts (2%). For purposes of the analysis, the nurse who reported working rotating shifts was categorized as working night shift since she worked straight nights during the two-week data-gathering period. Although only three participants (5.8%) reported a prior diagnosis of IBS, a total 18 participants (35%) met criteria for the diagnosis of IBS using the Rome III criteria. Participant BMIs ranged from 18.2 to 39.5 with a mean BMI of 26.7 ± 5.4 . As illustrated in Table 1, there were no significant differences by shift type in terms of age, BMI, diagnosis of IBS or type of IBS.

Instruments

Data for this study was obtained using a variety of subjective and objective measures. A Demographic Questionnaire and Brief Health History was used to collect information about participant age, and the usual shift worked. Participants were also asked to report any previous diagnosis of inflammatory bowel disorders or chronic diseases affecting the GI, and to list current medications and supplements used. The IBS module from the Rome III Questionnaire (2006) consists of 10 questions that ask subjects to rate the frequency of recurrent abdominal pain or discomfort, onset of pain associated with a change in frequency of stools, and the onset of pain associated with a change in the form of stools. This module is considered the gold standard for assessing functional bowel symptoms.

Samples of gut microbiota were collected just before the beginning and just after the end participants' work shift at the end of the two week data-collection period using validated, field-tested methods consistent with the Human Microbiome Project (Methé 2012). Four specimens (two each time) were collected using the Elution-swap system (Copan). The rectal swabs were stored in 1 mL of Amies transport medium (Copan) and immediately frozen and stored until DNA extraction. Prior to extraction, fecal material (200 mg) was suspended in 500- μ l lysozyme (20 mg/ml in 20 mM Tris-HCl pH 8, 2 mM EDTA, 1.2% w/v Triton X-100) and incubated at 37°C for 2 h using the QIAamp® DNA Stool Mini Kit (Qiagen, Inc., Valencia, CA).

Procedure

After obtaining approval from the Emory University's IRB (MOD001-IRB00089064) and Emory Healthcare's Nursing Research Council, emails describing the study were sent to all staff nurses. Those interested in participating were instructed to contact the research team to schedule an appointment to provide informed consent, review study procedures, and complete the demographic and Rome III questionnaire. After written informed consent was obtained, the participant's work schedule was then reviewed to determine an appropriate date to collect samples of gut microbiota at the beginning and end of the participant's shift.

Data Analysis

DNA extraction & 16S rRNA sequencing DNA extraction and 16S sequencing was performed by Omega Bioservices (Norcross, GA, USA) using a standard protocol. DNA was isolated using Omega Biotek Mag-Bind® Universal Pathogen DNA Kit. The V3-V4 region of the bacterial 16S rRNA gene sequences were amplified using the primer pair containing the gene-specific sequences and Illumina adapter overhang nucleotide sequences. The full length primer sequences are: 16S Amplicon PCR Forward Primer (5'- TCGTCGGCAGCGTCAGATGTGTATAAGAGACAGCCTACGGGNGGCWGCAG) and 16S Amplicon PCR Reverse Primer (5'- GTCTCGTGGGCTCGGAGATGTGTATAAGAGACAGGACTACHVGGGTATCTAATCC) . For amplicon PCR, each 25 µL of polymerase chain reaction (PCR) reaction contained 12.5 ng of sample DNA as input, 12.5 µL 2x KAPA HiFi HotStart ReadyMix (Kapa Biosystems, Wilmington, MA) and 5 µL of 1 µM of each primer. PCR reactions were carried with an initial denaturation step performed at 95°C for 3min followed by 25

cycles of denaturation (95°C, 30 s), annealing (55°C, 30 s) and extension (72°C, 30 sec), and a final elongation of 5 min at 72°C. PCR product was cleaned up from the reaction mix with Mag-Bind RxnPure Plus magnetic beads (Omega Bio-tek, Norcross, GA). A second index PCR amplification, used to incorporate barcodes and sequencing adapters into the final PCR product, was performed in 25 µL reactions, using the same master mix conditions as described above. Cycling conditions were as follows: 95°C for 3 minutes, followed by 8 cycles of 95°C for 30", 55°C for 30" and 72°C for 30". A final, 5 minutes' elongation step was performed at 72°C. The libraries were normalized with Mag-Bind® EquiPure Library Normalization Kit ((Omega Bio-tek, Norcross, GA) then pooled. The pooled library ~600 bases in size was checked using an Agilent 2200 TapeStation and sequenced (2 x 300 bp paired-end read setting) on the MiSeq (Illumina, San Diego, CA). Sequence data was submitted to the National Center for Bioinformatic Information Short Read Archive database: accession PRJNA687007.

Processing of sequence data and assignment to Operational Taxonomic Units (OTUs) Data processing, including demultiplexing, QC filtering, contamination and sample mislabeling data checks, OTU representation, taxonomy assignment via a reference database (Caporaso 2010; Wang 2007), and phylogeny and diversity analysis (Lozupone 2007; Lozupone 2006; Lozupone 2005) was done using R packages dada2 (Callahan 2016; McMurdie 2013).

Statistical Analysis

All data elements collected were evaluated for completeness (extent of missing data values and reasons for missing data as can be determined) and accuracy (relative to minimizing typos and inaccuracies from data collection methods) to maximize data quality and integrity. Additionally, all data was analyzed for descriptive statistical summaries and underlying distributions to provide initial estimates of the measures of centrality (means and medians), and variance (standard deviation, interquartile range, minimum and maximum).


We compared the Chao1 (measuring species richness) and Shannon (measuring both richness and evenness) diversity indices of cases and controls since loss of taxonomic diversity in general is an indicator of disease state in many ecological systems. We used Principal Coordinates Analysis (PCoA) to visualize clustering of the data based on distances computed using the Bray-Curtis (measuring difference of samples based on relative abundance of species) and Jaccard (measuring difference of samples based on presence-absence of species) metrics.

Given that this is a pilot study with 51 subjects, the primary focus was computing initial estimates for (a) differences between day and night shift workers and (b) differences between subjects with and without IBS symptoms relative to microbiome diversity. These analyses will consist primarily of two-group comparisons (t-tests, chi-square tests) between day versus night shift workers and between subjects with and without IBS symptoms, using analysis of variance and general linear model procedures. For the two gut microbiome samples obtained in the morning and two gut microbiome samples

obtained in the evening for each subject, the Linear Decomposition Model (LDM) (Hu 2020; Zhu in press) will be used to evaluate differences between these two times, as well as how the differences depend on the differences between subjects (e.g., day shift vs. night shift; IBS vs. no IBS). LDM helps to evaluate the proportion of variance in the outcome (gut microbiome measurements) explained within subjects (morning vs evening) compared to the proportion of variance explained between subjects (shift worked and presence of IBS). To analyze the associations between shift type and the composition of the participants' gut microbiome, we analyzed the fecal samples of night and day shift workers first compared the alpha diversity and beta diversity of the microbiome communities as well as the relative abundance and presence-absence of individual genera by shift type, then evaluated whether there were differences in the microbiome when the first specimen was collected in the evening and the second specimen in the morning (night shift nurses) versus having the first specimen collected in the morning and the second one in the evening (day shift nurses). Finally, we examined whether there were any differences in the alpha diversity and beta diversity of the microbiome communities as well as the relative abundance and presence-absence of individual genera of nurses with IBS compared to those without IBS.

Results

As shown in Figure 1, there were no significant differences in alpha diversity between day and night shift nurses ($p=0.411$ based on Chao1 index and $p=0.242$ based Shannon index). Nor were there differences in Beta diversity by shift type ($p=0.476$ and $p=0.625$ by the PERMANOVA method based on Bray-Curtis and Jaccard distances,

267 respectively (Figure 2). Nor were there differences in relative abundance and presence-
 268 absence data across all genera ($p=0.489$ and $p=0.824$ by the LDM method).
 269
 270 However, Figure 3 shows an increase of the log Chao1 index from the beginning to the
 271 end of the shift for day-shift workers while a decrease for night-shift workers; so does
 272 the Shannon index. We found that the change of both alpha diversity indices from the
 273 beginning to the end of the shift was significantly different between day shift and night
 274 shift workers ($p=0.034$ for Chao1 and $p=0.08$  Shannon), although the change among
 275 the pooled workers was not significantly different ($p=0.473$ for Chao1 and $p=0.236$ for
 276 Shannon) possibly due to the cancellation of effects with opposite directions. In terms of
 277 beta diversity, samples obtained from the same participants tend to cluster together and
 278 samples from the same time on sample participants tend to cluster together (See Figure
 279 4). Now the change of the beta diversity metrics from the beginning to the end of the
 280 shift among the pooled workers was marginally significant or significant ($p=0.056$ and
 281 0.014 by PERMANOVA based on Bray-Curtis and Jaccard, respectively). Marginally
 282 significant and significant findings were also noted by the LDM ($p=0.035$ and 0.063 by
 283 LDM based on relative abundance and presence-absence data, respectively). However,
 284 there is not enough evidence to confirm that the change was significantly different
 285 between day shift and night shift workers possibly due to the small sample size,
 286 although there was suggestive evidence ($p=0.192$ and 0.118 by PERMANOVA based
 287 on Bray-Curtis and Jaccard, respectively; $p=0.320$ and 0.134 by the LDM based on the
 288 relative abundance and presence-absence data.) In addition, the LDM based on relative
 289 abundance data revealed seven OTUs to be differentially abundant; ASV_455(S5-A14a,

290 more abundant at the beginning of the shift),
 291 ASV_2527(Ruminocaceae_NK4A214_group, more abundant at the end),
 292 ASV_1304(Ruminococcus_1, more abundant at the end), ASV_221 (Mobiluncus, more
 293 abundant at the beginning), ASV_7(Campylobacter), ASV_130(Alistipes, more
 294 abundant at the end), and ASV_62(Agathobacter, more abundant at the end).

295

296 Finally, as shown in Figure 5 there were no significant difference in alpha diversity when
 297 comparing participants without and with IBS symptoms ($p=0.849$ for Chao 1, $p=0.484$
 298 for Shannon, by the LDM method). Although there were no differences in beta diversity
 299 by whether or not the participant had symptoms of IBS ($p=0.206$ and $p=0.213$ by the
 300 PERMANOVA method based on Bray-Curtis and Jaccard distances), there were
 301 significant differences based on the LDM results. Specifically, three OTUs were
 302 detected to be differentially abundant (ASV_1160 (Flavonifractor), ASV_1134
 303 (Oscillibacter) and ASV_2379 (Ruminiclostridium_9) by the LDM method based on
 304 relative abundance data ($p=0.2$). There were significant differences ($p=0.03$) in the
 305 LDM based on presence-absence, which detected three OTUs (ASV_1160
 306 (Flavonifractor), ASV_2379 (Ruminiclostridium_9) and ASV_47 (Escherichia/Shigella))
 307 to be significantly more abundant in participants reporting IBS symptoms.

308

309 Discussion

310

311 The findings of this pilot study suggest that there are no differences in the richness and
 312 diversity of species when samples from nurses working day and night shifts were
 313 compared. There were however some changes in both alpha and beta diversity metrics
 314 when specimens collected at the beginning and end of the shifts were compared and

there was also some evidence that the changes were different for day shift and night shift workers, with increased alpha diversity noted at the end of the day shift and decreased alpha diversity noted at the end of the night shift. Seven OTUs were found to be differentially abundant between the beginning and end of the shifts for the entire sample. In addition, there were three OTUs to be differentially abundant in participants reporting IBS symptoms.

Studies comparing the effects of shift work on the gut microbiome are limited and somewhat contradictory. For example, a study of 10 male security guards who worked both day and night shifts found there were no significant differences in in alpha or beta diversity within and across-subject variation for both shifts (Mortas 2020). In contrast, slight changes in microbial abundance and diversity were noted when 22 subjects, aged 20-35 years, delayed their sleep period for 2-4 hours (Liu 2020). Although there have been studies comparing circadian variation in the gut microbiota in mice (Thaiss 2014) and another describing the results samples collected during multiple time points over several days by two subjects (Thaiss 2014), our study is the first to compare the richness and diversity of gut microbiota collected from 51 human participants at two different time points in 24 hours.

Even though there are numerous studies that have reported increased and/or decreased amounts of various gut bacteria among patients with IBS (Bhattarai Y. 2017; Casén 2015; Pittayanon 2019; Salonen 2010; Tap 2017), a recent systematic review found only nine studies that discussed differences in alpha-diversity in patients with IBS

compared to normal controls (Pittayanon 2019). Slightly over half of the studies (55.6%) reported a significant decrease in the richness and diversity in patients with IBS (Carroll 2011; Carroll 2012; Liu 2016; Pozuelo 2015; Rangel 2015), whereas the remaining four studies (Carroll 2012; Durban 2012; Rigsbee 2012; Tap 2017), like our current study, revealed no differences in alpha-diversity compared to healthy controls. Like other studies comparing patients with IBS symptoms to healthy controls, our pilot study found increased Firmicutes (Chong 2019), specifically Flavonifractor, Oscillibacter, and Ruminiclostridium among participants with IBS (Casén 2015). The increased abundance of *E. coli*/ *Shigella* possibly reflects the suspected relationship between Shigellosis and IBS (Youn 2016).

IBS is estimated to have a world-wide prevalence of 10-15% (Canavan 2014; Sperber 2017). Prevalence rates of IBS are typically higher among nurses, with rates ranging from 17.4% in China (Liu 2014) to 45.2% in Nigeria (Akere 2014). The prevalence rate of IBS among study participants was 35%, quite similar to the prevalence rate reported among nurses at the University of Michigan Medical Center (36.6%) (Nojkov et al. 2010). However, unlike Nojkov et al's study of hospital staff nurses (Nojkov et al. 2010), and other studies of shift workers (Kim 2013), there were no differences in the prevalence of IBS symptoms among day and night shift nurses in our study.

This study is limited by a number of factors. First, our study population consisted of a convenience sample of nurses that might not be representative of the larger nursing workforce or the larger population of shift workers. The overall participation rate was

relatively low, which raises concerns about how representative the participants were of the total population of nurses who were invited to participate. Additionally, given the focus of the study, nurses who experienced IBS symptoms may have been more likely to participate than those who did not experience IBS symptoms. Finally, the severity of IBS symptoms and quality of life was not assessed, two factors which may have been impacted by gut microbiome diversity and richness.

Conclusions

There were no differences between in the richness and diversity when samples of the gut microbiome from nurses working day and night shifts were compared. However, when specimens collected at the beginning and ends of the shifts were compared, there were some differences in alpha and beta diversity. Three OTUs were more common in participants reporting IBS symptoms.

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Table 1 (on next page)

A Comparison of Day and Night Shift Participants

Table 1 Sample Description

	Day Shift (n=24)	Night Shift (n=27)	P Value
Age (mean)	32.4	33.3	0.73*
BMI (mean)	27.1	26.3	0.60*
BMI			
<20	1	3	0.41**
20-24.9	10	8	
25-29.9	5	10	
>30	8	6	
IBS (Rome III criteria)			
No	17	16	0.56**
Yes	7	11	
IBS Symptoms			
IBS with diarrhea	1	2	1.0**
IBS with constipation	1	1	
IBS mixed type	5	7	
IBS un-subtyped	0	1	

*Welsh two-sample t-test

** Fisher's exact test

Figure 1(on next page)

Alpha Diversity by Shift Type

Figure 1 Alpha diversity by shift type

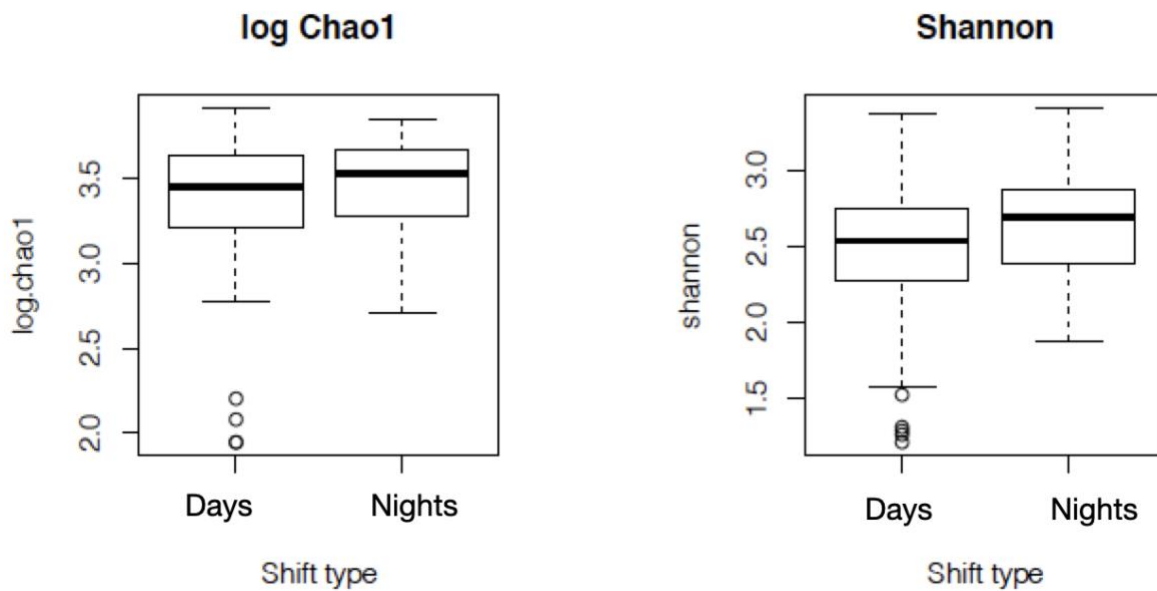


Figure 2(on next page)

PCoA Plot Comparing Beta Diversity by Shift Type

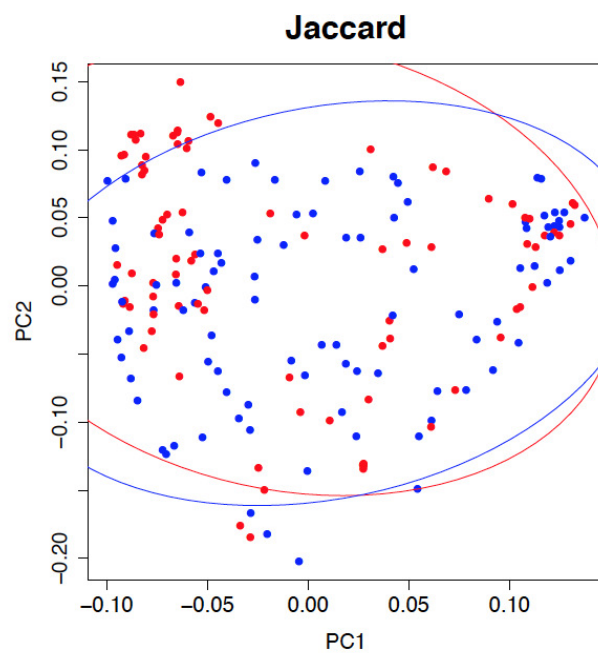
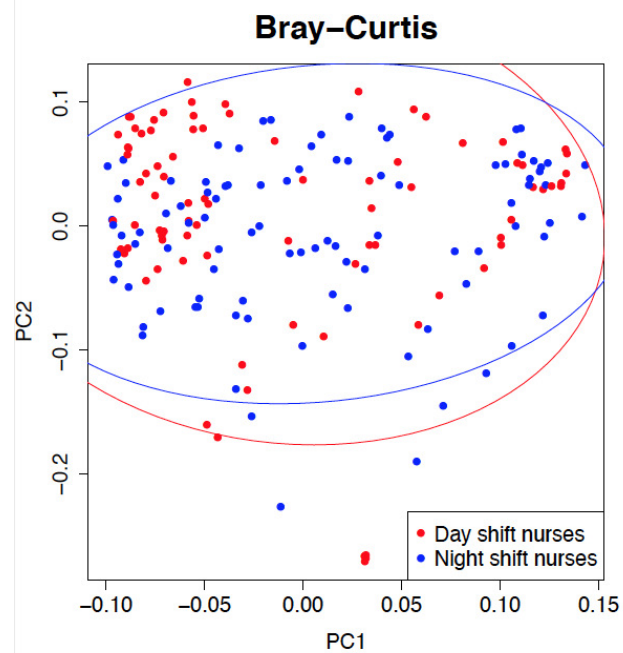


Figure 3

Changes in Alpha Diversity from the Beginning to End of the Shift by Shift Type

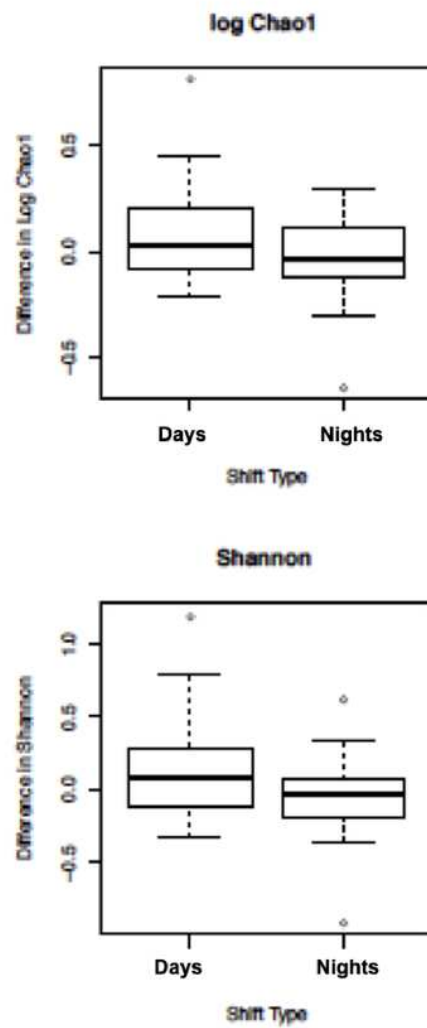


Figure 4

Principal Components Analysis by Participant ID

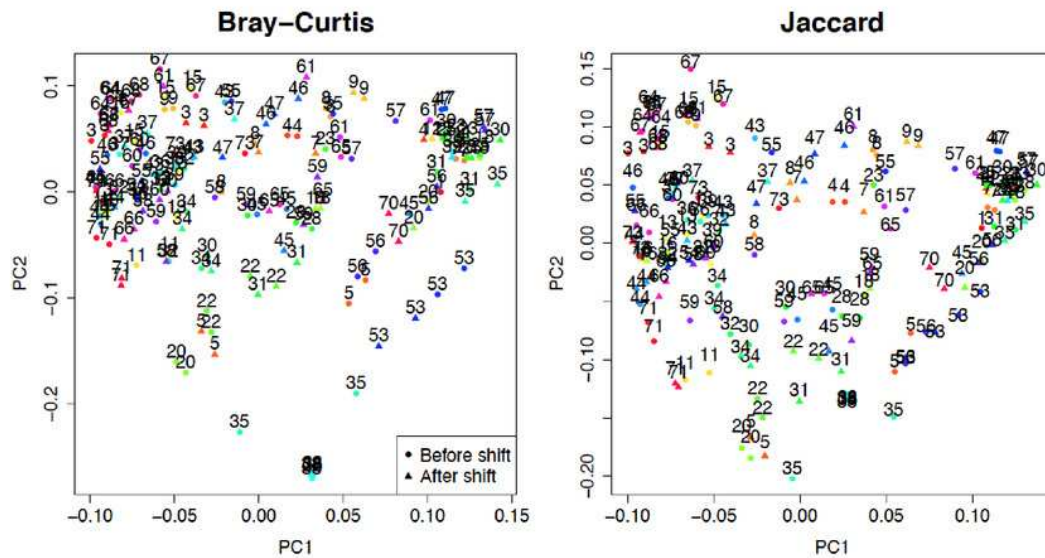


Figure 5

Alpha Diversity by Presence or Absence of IBS

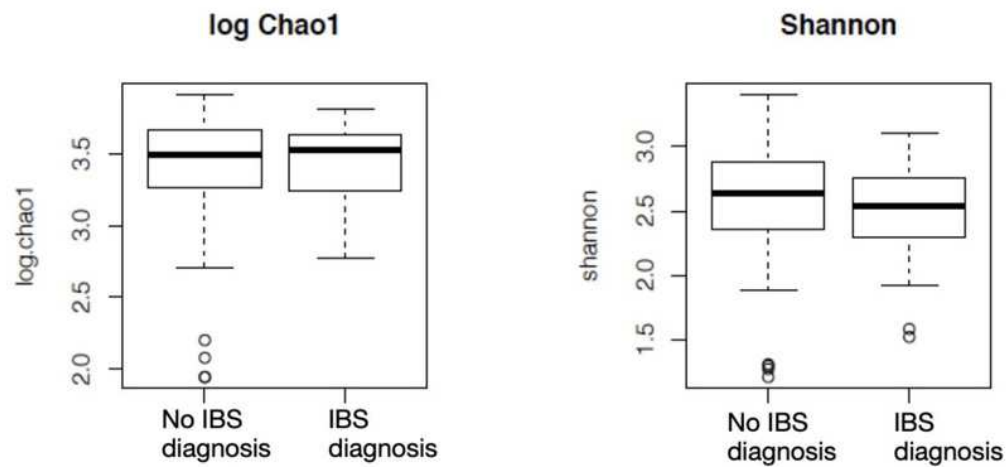


Figure 6

PCoA Plot Comparing Beta Diversity by Presence or Absence of IBS Symptoms

