

Meet the professor: CSU's Weir studies link between intestinal, overall health

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Tiffany Weir

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• **Title:** Assistant professor • **Age:** 40 • **Family:** Husband and children Kiwi, 8, and Johnny, 5 months • **Hobbies:** Rock collecting, hiking, skiing, reading and cooking • **Education:** Bachelor's and master's degrees from Penn State and a Ph.D. in cell and molecular biology from Colorado State University • **City of residence:** Fort Collins • **Date started at CSU:** 2011 as a professor

Question: What does your typical day look like?

Answer: This semester I'm teaching a lot, so my typical day is centered around preparing for and presenting my classes.

The rest of my day is spent meeting with graduate and undergraduate students in my lab, going over data from their projects and trying to figure out the next steps we need to take for their stories to evolve. This is probably the most fun and rewarding part of the day for me — the whole pursuit of discovery, just figuring things out and generating new ideas side by side with these students.

Q: Describe any research you do and why it matters:

A: Our research is centered around intestinal health and how diet can be used to optimize intestinal health. The state of your intestines and their microbes really affects so many other systems in your body, from how you gain weight all the way to your mental state. It is really a fascinating area of research, and I feel fortunate that I get to pursue questions about how our gut health affects our overall health.

The research projects in our lab range from looking at how specific diet interventions change the gut microbiota to reduce intestinal inflammation in colorectal cancer survivors, to studying how our resident microbes metabolize artificial sweeteners. We are also really interested in fermented foods and their impact on gut health, an area of research that complements a new major in fermentation science and technology that is now offered in our department.

Q: Why did you become a professor?

A: I became a professor because I never want to stop learning. This job gives me an opportunity to explore scientific questions that interest me. I'd like to think that what I do will contribute to the global pool of knowledge in the area of nutrition and health that will eventually allow doctors and dieticians to personalize diet recommendations.

Q: What is your greatest achievement?

A: So far I'd say that it is managing to find some balance in my life. I really love my work, but I prioritize

family time, too. I have a couple of great kids and I like spending time with them. I'd like a little more time for exercise and sleep in my schedule, but we'll get there.