

The Wellness Family

Dr. Chang Keeps You Informed

Probiotics

The message has been sent loud and clear with anti-bacterial hand soap, body wash and household cleaning products that bacteria are bad. Advertisers have taught the public to believe that any bacteria left alive are a threat to our health. So, the idea that it is beneficial to take a few billion a day in pill form might seem a little far-fetched; yet science is proving that this is the case.

What are probiotics?

The World Health Organization defines probiotics as "live microorganisms, which, when administered in adequate amounts, confer a health benefit on the host." Basically speaking, probiotics are "good" or "beneficial" bacteria that are thought to promote health by suppressing the growth of potentially harmful bacteria, enhancing the protective barrier of the digestive tract, improving immune function and helping to produce Vitamin K.

Generally found in yogurt or fermented dairy products, probiotics may provide some of the same health benefits as the more than 500 species of microorganisms that already exist in our body. These friendly bacteria that live in our intestines are called flora and they help to regulate our digestion and stool patterns.

Why do we need probiotics?

It is estimated that more than 70 million people suffer from common digestive disorders and symptoms including the following:

- Irritable Bowel Syndrome
- Lactose Intolerance
- Gas and Crohn's disease
- Side effects of radiation therapy
- Diarrhea or Constipation

Good bacteria living in our digestive tract play an important role in both our digestion and immune systems. There are a number of medical, diet and lifestyle factors that can disturb the delicate balance between flora and yeast in our intestines and colon leading to digestive disorders and symptoms.

The first attack on our flora tends to be medical in cause. Antibiotics are the first choice of the medical

profession to treat a bacterial infection. The problem with antibiotics is that they don't just attack the bad bacteria, they destroy every bacterium in sight, including the flora.

Dietary choices and stress can also affect our flora or good bacteria. When these outside factors deplete the number of good bacteria in our bodies it can lead to many serious health issues including thrush, vaginal yeast infections, diarrhea as well as diaper rash for infants and toddlers.



"Probiotics are live microorganisms, which confer a health benefit on the host."

How are probiotics beneficial?

Depleted flora creates an imbalance in the colon called dysbiosis. Probiotics help support the naturally-occurring good bacteria in our digestive system and return that important balance.

Recent studies suggest that probiotics can reduce antibiotic associated diarrhea by 60% and may be helpful for people suffering from Crohn's disease and irritable bowel syndrome.

Additional studies have shown that certain probiotics may help maintain remission of ulcerative colitis and prevent relapse of Crohn's disease and the recurrence of pouchitis (a complication of surgery to treat ulcerative colitis).

Other studies have also proven that acidophilus can promote the growth of healthy bacteria in the colon and reduce the conversion of bile into carcinogens (cancer-causing agents).

Probiotics have also proven useful in maintaining urogenital health. Just like the intestinal tract, the vagina has a finely balanced ecosystem of yeast and flora. *Lactobacilli* strains make it too acidic for harmful

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microorganisms to survive, but this system can be thrown out of balance by a number of factors including antibiotics, spermicides, and birth control pills.

This lends to the probability that probiotics can be helpful in the treatment of bacterial vaginosis, yeast infections and urinary tract infections.

Are probiotics beneficial for children?

Many studies have been performed to find the best use and recommendations for probiotics in children. Probably the greatest benefit discovered so far is that probiotics may improve the bioavailability of certain nutrients; this is the extent and rate to which a drug is taken up by the body in a physiologically active form. Some of the nutrients that are believed to be affected by a probiotics regimen include:

- B vitamins
- Calcium
- Iron
- Zinc
- Copper
- Magnesium
- Phosphorus

In addition, studies have proven that certain strains (specifically *Lactobacillus GG*) may aid in reducing the rate of acute diarrhea and rotavirus shedding. Parents have also reported a 25% decrease in diaper rash among babies being given a supplement of probiotics.

Sources of Probiotics

While many foods naturally contain probiotics it's difficult to use food as a regular source. Many food products do not list the type of probiotics included and are not required to do so.

Natural food sources of probiotics include:

- Yogurt or kefir
- Acidophilus drinks
- Fermented foods such as sauerkraut

The best source of probiotics is dietary supplements purchased at a reputable health food store. The products offered at a popular retail chain or grocery store are not going to be of the same high quality or contain the right mixture of microorganisms.

Since different probiotics contain different strains of bacteria, some of which provide benefits that are different than others, it's very important to find a good manufacturer that stands behind the ingredients in their supplements.

What are different strains?

As with all bacterium there are different strains and many have been proven to have no health benefit. Many others have proven that they cannot survive the process of ingestion, as the bacteria are killed in the stomach before they reach the intestines where they need to colonize to be beneficial. The two most commonly recommended strains of good bacteria are *Bifidobacterium bifidum* and *Lactobacillus casei*.

When purchasing probiotics remember that they need to be kept refrigerated to retain their motility and that infants should be given a reformulated powdered version generally available at your local holistic healthcare provider's office or health food store.

Also remember, when purchasing probiotics be sure to speak with your Family Wellness Chiropractor or holistic healthcare professional. It is important to purchase the right probiotics to meet the needs of you and your family.

Dear Patient,

Dr. Chang is dedicated to providing you with the absolute best in family wellness care. So take a moment today to discuss with your Family Wellness Chiropractor any concerns you may have regarding your family's overall health and wellness.

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