

Health and Wellness:
Probiotics, Prebiotics and Synbiotics
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Probiotics

Probiotics are microorganisms which are synonymous with “good” bacteria, and they can help assist greatly to improve digestion by offering protection from harmful bacteria. Probiotics are also thought to be responsible for improving many other health conditions such as:

- treating diarrhea, especially following treatment with certain antibiotics;
- preventing and treating vaginal yeast infections and urinary tract infections;
- treating irritable bowel syndrome;
- reducing bladder cancer recurrence;
- speeding treatment of certain intestinal infections;
- preventing and treating eczema in children; and
- reducing or preventing the severity of colds and flu.

Probiotics are most commonly found in fermented foods with additional active live cultures. Cheese, enhanced yogurt, miso and sauerkraut are a few examples of foods which naturally contain probiotics.

Who Can Benefit From Probiotics?

Except for a newborn under the age of one month, almost everyone can benefit from probiotics. The other exceptions are for people with compromised immune systems and central venous lines because probiotic usage has been reported to cause bacterial infection, albeit rarely, in such patients.

Prebiotics

Prebiotics, on the other hand, are not bacteria at all. Rather, they are nondigestible carbohydrates which act as food for probiotics. They are the nutrients that feed our good bacteria (probiotics) which promote good digestive health. Scientific research has shown prebiotics to be associated with improved mineral absorption, increased immune performance, reduced allergies, and improved heart health. Examples of foods which contain prebiotics are artichokes, asparagus, bananas, berries, garlic, honey, legumes, onions, soys, unrefined grains and wheat bran.

Who Can Benefit From Prebiotics?

Anyone who wants the following in their life: improved colon bacterial makeup and bowel regularity, increased calcium and magnesium absorption for stronger bones, enhanced immune system, increased energy and suppressed appetite and reduced chance of intestinal infection. Thus, in summary, prebiotics can benefit everyone.

Synbiotics

The combination of probiotics and prebiotics is called synbiotics. It is so named for the synergy between these two substances. Synbiotics combine the addition of beneficial bacteria and the encouragement of the growth of resident beneficial bacteria. Examples of foods which are considered symbiotic are fermented dairy products such as yogurt and kefir because of the live bacteria they contain and fuel they need to thrive.

Who Can Benefit From Synbiotics?

Just as most people can benefit from probiotics and prebiotics independently, most people can also benefit from the combined benefits of both. Actually, even though the word “symbiotic” may not be mentioned on the bottle (perhaps because it is a relatively new term), it is important to read the label because some probiotics actually do contain prebiotics.

Our Immune System

Since about 70% of our immune system is located in our intestines, it’s very important to learn more about this topic for every family member to be well. Depending on a person’s age and health, sometimes a probiotic is recommended, other times a prebiotic is suggested and still other times it is best to take both or a symbiotic.

One of the best ways to achieve optimal digestion is by eating a healthy diet (e.g., five to nine fruits and veggies a day, minimal fats, et cetera). If that is difficult or impossible to achieve, remember to add probiotics, prebiotics and synbiotics to the list of items which are discussed during each family member’s annual visit to their **nutritionally-knowledgeable physician**. Additionally some supplements are formulated with very high-quality purity and control, however, this is not the case with every maker. Choose a manufacturer with a trustworthy reputation. While most healthy adults can safely add foods that contain prebiotics and probiotics to their diet, be forewarned that side effects are rare. For those considering adding probiotics, prebiotics or synbiotics, key is finding a physician who is well-informed on this subject.

Keep Reading on This Topic:

This is only a cursory overview. Everyone is encouraged to read and learn as much as they can.

Here are some of the links used to write this article:

- 1) http://anhi.org/learning/pdfs/bcdecker/Prebiotics_Probiotics_Synbiotics_Functional_Foods.pdf
- 2) <http://theconsciouslife.com/top-probiotic-foods.htm>
- 3) <http://www.vrp.com/digestive-health/probiotics-prebiotics-and-synbiotics>
- 4) http://nutrition.med.harvard.edu/research/base_04immun.html
- 5) http://www.hopkinsmedicine.org/news/publications/johns_hopkins_health/fall_2011/probiotics_pros_and_cons
- 6) <http://www.mayoclinic.com/health/probiotics/AN00389>

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