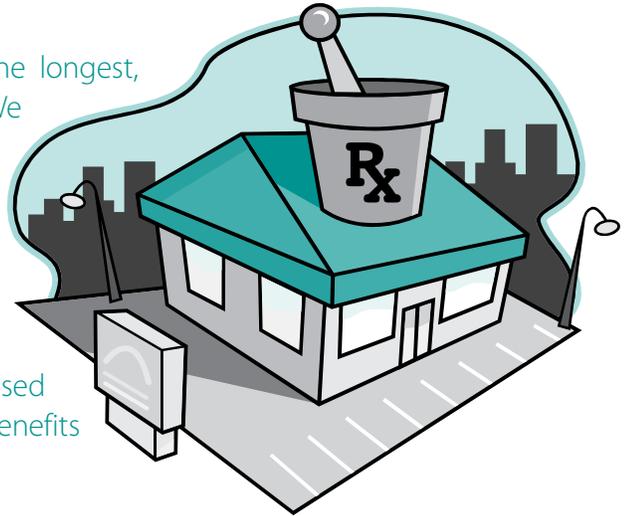


Acidophilus

Benefits Beyond the GI Tract

by Channing Dallstream

Americans are neither the healthiest nor do we live the longest, despite pharmacies on practically every street corner. We have an average mortality of 78 with a long list of age-related diseases. Our over-processed diet and over-dependence on prescription medications instead of healthy lifestyle choices add to our early demise. By contrast, those in less developed nations consume cultured milk products and raw plant foods which contain life-giving probiotics that give them overall better health. If you've only considered probiotics for gut health, you may be surprised to learn how something so simple can affect longevity and offer benefits beyond the GI tract.



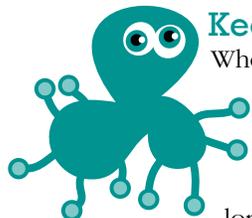
“Probiotics, literally meaning ‘for life’, are the friendly bacteria that reside in our digestive tracts. Unfortunately, they are often destroyed by antibiotics, birth control pills, stress, alcohol, acid-blocking drugs and infections,” says physician Hyla Cass, author of *Supplement Your Prescription*.¹ Probiotics are present in cultured food products including yogurt, miso, sourdough bread and raw sauerkraut. *Lactobacillus acidophilus*, the most commonly-known probiotic, has always done more than help with digestion.

Immune System

Your immune system, when working at optimal levels, can beat health invaders before you knew there is a threat. “Lactic acid-producing microorganisms such as *L acidophilus* have been called a ‘second immune system’ because they put the brakes on growth of disease-causing bacteria such as salmonella and shingella-caused dysentery, various types of diarrhea and even virus-caused flu.”² The presence of good bacteria enhances the digestion of lactose by producing the enzyme, lactase, encouraging a more acid environment which microorganisms don’t like. Studies have shown that probiotics can “enhance natural immunity in healthy elderly subjects in as little as six weeks of use.”³ Current research is developing a way to use *Lactobacillus acidophilus* orally “to stimulate mucosal immune responses against deadly pathogens” thereby “directing and regulating acquired immunity.”⁴

Oral Health

The quest for minty fresh breath is accidentally altering the balance of the beneficial bacteria in the mouth. Regular use of mints and mouthwash plays a part in reducing the effectiveness of our digestive system in its very first stage by reducing the naturally present “good” bacteria! Rinsing with acidophilus powder dissolved in water can boost the beneficial bacteria, improve your breath and reduce the incidence of canker sores. You can reduce the amount of odor-producing bacteria in your mouth by taking acidophilus each day.⁵



Keeping Yeast at Bay

When yeast is allowed to take over, the digestion system can’t perform at its optimal level. And because antibiotics kill probiotics, their use alters the balance of beneficial and harmful bacteria. What happens in the small intestines doesn’t stay in the small intestines, but is expressed in other areas of the body. When the yeast is in charge, skin conditions including eczema, psoriasis, chronic rashes and acne can be present. Fatigue, sugar cravings and secondary conditions like achy joints and pollen allergies can surface.⁶ Plus long-term yeast overgrowth can lead to chronic health conditions like anemia and osteoporosis.

Anemia

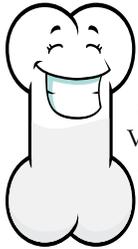
Anemia can be the result of *Candidiasis* (yeast overgrowth) using iron as a food source which may lead directly to less available iron for the body. Lactoferrin, an iron-binding protein found in your ‘fighter’ cells and bodily secretions (milk,

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Acidophilus

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tears, saliva, bile, etc.), is produced by “good bacteria” in the digestive tract and is considered to be an important piece of the non-specific immune system.⁷ Normally you can produce enough lactoferrin so your body absorbs all the iron it needs.⁸ Frequent iron deficiencies leading to anemia may be caused not by lack of iron, but by poor iron absorption because we don't have enough lactoferrin. So getting rid of the yeast overgrowth enables the lactoferrin to do its job.



Bone Health

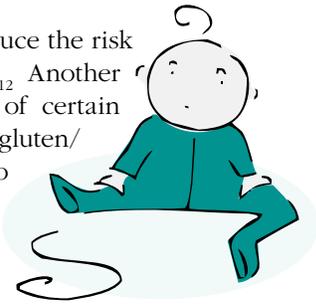
Acidophilus helps your intestines absorb minerals as well as make lactase, vitamins A, B and K. Vitamin K plays an important role in bone health and osteoporosis prevention. In a previous *Health Points* article, To Your Health advisor Michael Smith, PhD, MDSc explains that the need for vitamin K increases with age and that a major source for it in Asia is fermented legumes such as tempeh. Smith also points out that disorders of the small intestines including Celiac, Crohn's disease and yeast overgrowth can affect nutrient metabolism and absorption. “Reduced bone mineral density is most often caused by insufficient calcium, magnesium, vitamins K2 and D3 which is traced to poor diets and poor nutrient absorption,” writes Smith.⁹

Re-establishing the Balance

A healthy lower GI tract has at least 85% beneficial bacteria to keep the 15% microorganism content in control. Cass advises to supplement with acidophilus for at least two weeks after finishing broad-spectrum antibiotics in addition to eating cultured foods. As with any supplement, follow the dosage instructions as manufacturers vary on how and when to take it. Keep in mind that supplements should contain a mix of the several strains of acidophilus found in the GI tract, although this article notes the L-acidophilus form for simplicity. As acidophilus is a ‘live’ bacteria, the colony count does go down over time. Most labels state the number of live units at time of manufacturer. (See box for suggested dose to deal with specific health issues.) According to the American Cancer Society, most sources suggest from one to 10 billion of live bacteria as a recommended daily dose.¹⁰ To reduce the time needed to repopulate the intestines with the friendly flora, consider adding short-chain fructooligosaccharides (FOS). This indigestible fiber passes through to the small intestines, acts as a food source and reduces the time needed for friendly bacteria repopulation. As FOS doesn't raise blood sugar levels it is safe for diabetics.¹¹

Science continues to explore the potential benefits of probiotics. A British study reports that “taking probiotics during pregnancy may lead to less

diabetes during pregnancy and reduce the risk of obesity later in a baby's life.”¹² Another study “show(s) protective effects of certain probiotic bacterial strains against gluten/gliadin” as a possible method to combat Celiac disease.¹³ Scientists around the world are exploring the use of probiotics in the reduction of the concentration of cancer-promoting enzymes; prevention of respiratory tract infections; cholesterol reduction; and therapy for autoimmune diseases (e.g. arthritis).¹⁴



How Much Do You Need?

(measured in live microorganisms)

Prevention or treatment of diarrhea

1–2 billion a day

Vaginal yeast infections

1–2 billion plus plain yogurt daily

Maintenance dose

1–10 billion a day

Source: Integrative Medicine Communications

Supplements can fill in the gaps but diet improvement is necessary. “Societies that eat a lot of cultured foods tend to be longer lived and healthier,” says Cass. When you are not having plain yogurt, yakult, tempeh or other cultured food on a regular basis, or if you just completed a dose of antibiotics, a good quality supplement keeps you on track and helps fill in the gaps. Now science is proving that acidophilus' benefits extend well beyond the GI tract.

References omitted for space considerations and can be requested by contacting the editor@e-tyh.com.

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