

Good Health Begins with Probiotics

New research highlights the multifaceted role of probiotics in health

By Jonathan Clinthorne, PhD

Have you ever wondered why a friend can consume gluten with no issues, but you can't? Maybe you and your significant other eat the same food, but you gain weight and they don't? Not too long ago, most scientists would shrug their shoulders and blame genetics. However, new research shows that the trillions of bacteria living in our intestines may actually be the key. In fact, these bacteria, referred to as the gut microbiota, are known to influence the health and function of the gut, brain, liver, and even the skin.ⁱ This new appreciation for the importance of the gut microbiota has also highlighted how consuming beneficial bacteria, also known as probiotics, can help combat many of the most common health challenges faced by Americans.

Gluten

The rate at which people have been developing celiac disease and non-celiac gluten sensitivity has been rising so quickly that genetics alone cannot be blamed. An alternative explanation that is quickly gaining acceptance is that having the wrong type of bacteria in the gut can cause gluten sensitivity.^{iiiiiv} This hypothesis has prompted successful clinical trials showing that administration of probiotics can help ameliorate symptoms caused by gluten in sensitive populations, specifically *Bifidobacterium longum*.^v Other research supports these findings as other studies have shown that probiotics—specifically *Lactobacillus johnsonii*, *L. salivarius*, and *L. rhamnosus GG*—can help digest gluten or heal the gut after it has been damaged by gluten.^{vivii}

Memory

In a first of its kind, placebo-controlled, double-blind study, probiotic supplementation resulted in improvements in people with Alzheimer's disease. Researchers gave probiotics or placebos to 60 people who had been diagnosed with Alzheimer's disease. After 12 weeks of taking a probiotic containing *Lactobacillus acidophilus*, *L.casei*, *Bifidobacterium bifidum*, and *L.fermentum*, patients had modest improvements in cognition, whereas those taking the placebo declined.^{viii}

Detoxification

Exciting new research shows that the gut microbiota assist the liver with detoxification—gut bacteria are capable of breaking down different drugs and studies show probiotic bacteria can facilitate the removal of heavy metals from the body.^{ixx} Many strains of probiotics, especially *lactobacilli*, can 1) prevent absorption of heavy metals and pesticides 2) increase detoxification in the gut and 3) enhance natural detoxification in the liver.^{xixiiixixivxv}

Weight Loss, Smooth Skin, and Healthy Hair

The idea that probiotics assist with weight loss in adults when paired with a healthy diet is not brand new, however new research suggests this is applicable to children as well.^{xvi} A recent study found children taking a probiotic containing *L.rhamnosus*, *B.bifidum*, *B.longum*, and *Enterococcus faecium*, as well as fermentable fiber, lost almost three times more weight than those taking a placebo.^{xvii}

As amazing as it might sound, probiotic supplements have even been shown to reduce wrinkles, improve skin elasticity, and give hair a lustrous shine.^{xviiiix} Follow-up studies show that probiotic supplements exert their anti-aging effects by suppressing inflammation, normalizing skin pH, and restoring hormone levels.^{xxxxi}

Choosing a Probiotic

When choosing a probiotic it comes down to two things: do you have a specific problem you're targeting or do you simply want to cultivate overall health? For people with a particular issue, look for specific microbes that

have been studied for that condition. But if you just want to cultivate health, look for a multi-strain probiotic and consume probiotic-rich fermented foods on a regular basis.

Sources

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