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Does Your Body Need Probiotics?

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Recently, 57-year-old, Anne Turner started researching gentle ways to treat her irritable bowel syndrome and chronic digestive issues.

"I was not getting any relief with conventional methods, so I went to my local natural food store and asked the nutritionist if she had any recommendations for my specific conditions," she said.

To her surprise, the answer was simple and pain-free—she needed to take a dietary supplement called probiotics to replenish her digestive flora.

Probiotics, meaning "for life," are the antithesis of antibiotics, which are designed to kill most bacteria in the body, both good and bad.

Probiotics are naturally occurring beneficial bacteria located in the intestines, whose job it is to help prevent the harmful bacteria from wreaking havoc.

After a few weeks of taking a recommended probiotic supplement and making small changes in her diet, Turner started feeling better than she had in years, affirming her decision to treat herself with probiotics.

According to holistic nurse Luanne Pennesi, almost everyone, especially in today's industrialized society, can benefit from taking probiotics to help strengthen the immune system, utilize certain vitamins effectively, and may even reduce the risk of developing cancer.

"Probiotics are vital for proper digestion of fats and proteins, synthesizing vitamin K, which is vital for the prevention of osteoporosis and many of our B vitamins, plus they detoxify the intestinal tract and reduce cancer risks," she said.

The digestive track is home to more than 500 million species of bacteria; ideally 80 percent should be beneficial bacteria and 20 percent harmful bacteria.

"Probiotics are helpful when it comes to maintaining the body's chemical and hormone balance. Their ability to protect the body from absorbing toxins from the GI tract also makes them vital to our health and longevity," said Pennesi.

Good Bacteria vs. Bad

But with literally trillions of bacteria residing in the digestive tract, how do you know which ones are the "good" guys and which are the "bad?"

According to Renew Life's so-called experts in digestive care, the two most prevalent probiotics are lactobacilli, which make up the majority of the probiotics in your small intestine, and bifidobacteria, which make up the majority of the probiotics in the large intestine.

Lactobacilli help regulate the immune system, digesting nutrients such as proteins, carbohydrates and milk sugars; and produce compounds and acids that create an unfriendly environment for harmful bacteria. Lactobacilli are also the most prevalent in the vagina and help guard women from yeast infections.

Bifidobacteria, on the other hand, is located in the large intestine and are present in much higher in numbers. This is because there is less constant movement in the large intestine compared to the small intestine, which makes it easier for harmful bacteria to build up and multiply.

Bifidobacteria also ferment soluble fiber and produce compounds including short chain fatty acid, vitamin B and K. However, studies show that the population of bifidobacteria significantly declines with age and with unhealthy lifestyle practices.

"If its balance and function is thrown off by a poor diet, lack of proper hydration, overuse of antibiotics, overweight conditions, constipation and lack of exercise, you are setting yourself up for chronic illness and premature aging," said Pennesi.

So what are different kinds of ways you can get more healthy bacteria in your body?

Here are Pennesi's Top 3 recommendations:

- **Consult with your health care professional** and take a high quality probiotic supplement
- Enjoy foods with Fructo-oligo-saccharides (FOS), which feed the healthy flora (probiotics) of the body, like bananas, onions, garlic, artichokes, barley and tomatoes.
- Eat more kefir, sauerkraut, tempeh, umeboshi plum and yogurt that have the "live active bacteria" label on it.

However, Pennesi cautions that not all probiotics products contain both lactobacilli and bifidobacteria.

"The best thing to do is find a breakdown of what probiotics are in the product. I encourage people to use the phone numbers on the packaging and contact the company who manufacture the product. Most are happy to answer your questions", she said.

Minimizing the use of synthetic antibiotics, as they kill off healthy bacteria in the body, is also a great way to keep your healthy bacteria counts up.

Dr. Manny Alvarez reviewed this article