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# What YOU need to know about **Acidophilus & Your Health**

Research in the past year alone highlights the benefits of healthy gastrointestinal flora on immunity, obesity, diabetes and other disorders beyond the GI tract itself. *Health Points* advisor Carol Jamison NMD explains a few of them. Could be that a probiotic supplement may help keep your “tract” on the healthy track!

## Is acidophilus a probiotic?

Probiotics are bacteria or yeast organisms that may have beneficial effects on human physiology and health, if given in adequate amounts. They do this by enhancing digestion, immune function, and by blocking pathogens or by producing chemicals that kill pathogens.<sup>1</sup> Acidophilus is a species of friendly bacteria part of the Lactobacillus genus (*L. acidophilus*). There are several different strains of *L. acidophilus*. When the correct strain of probiotics are ingested for the target problem (digestion and elimination issues, *candidiasis*, vaginitis, dental cavities, urinary tract infections to name a few) wonderful healing can occur.<sup>2</sup>

## How does diet affect GI health?

Research repeatedly shows that diets high in fiber and low in animal fats encourage growth of good gut bacteria (ex: *prevotella* and *xylanibacter* microbes) that produce more short-chain fatty acids that then protect from inflammatory and noninfectious colonic disease (IBD, Crohn's, ulcerative colitis).<sup>3</sup> Consumption of refined sugars, fruit, dairy (lactose is a sugar), and in some cases most carbohydrates have shown to stimulate the growth of *candida albicans*, disrupting the balance of flora in the mouth, gut and vagina, suppress the immune system and leads to illness. In many studies with cases of candida-toxin-induced gut damage, immune system dysregulation, and vulvovaginitis, simple avoidance of sucrose, fructose, glucose and/or lactose kept the patients infection free!<sup>4</sup>

## Who should take a probiotic?

Probiotics are well tolerated by most people and can be safely taken daily on an empty stomach or at the end of a meal. To assist your immune system, to re-populate your gut during and after use of antibiotics (because antibiotics kill both pathogenic and beneficial bacteria), to treat chronic fungal and bacterial infections, including sinus infection, taking the correct strain of acidophilus, bifidobacteria and other forms of probiotics in relatively high doses for a while is a great idea. I find combining probiotics with a good diet, and digestive enzymes extremely effective. I also prefer, in most cases, intermittent supplementation with probiotics. My goal is to allow the gut to form its eco-system and learn to maintain it, and then add support when stresses like illness,

antibiotics, or poor diet are introduced. Others adhere to a continual daily intake of probiotic protocol. Those with severely compromised immune function, damaged GI barrier, the presence of an indwelling central venous catheter, severe underlying disease should AVOID use of long term, high dose probiotics.<sup>1</sup>

## How does GI tract health affect weight?

Recent studies demonstrate that obesity is correlated with an imbalance in normal gut microbiota.<sup>3</sup> Experimental and observational data suggest that obesity is associated with major changes, type and function of the gut flora.<sup>5</sup> Implications of one study theorize that 1) obese individual's harbor gut bacteria that promote excess weight gain 2) gut bacteria may influence behavior changes and increase amount of food intake and 3) gut bacteria may influence the ability to properly metabolize a meal.<sup>6</sup>

## Why might good GI health help your heart?

It is important to have a good probiotic balance along the entire gut, starting at the mouth. There is good evidence that periodontal disease is a risk factor for atherosclerosis and congestive heart disease. It seems that the bacteria related to periodontal disease promote a hyper-inflammatory response associated with cardiovascular events.<sup>7</sup>

## What else is linked to healthy GI flora?

Several studies show a positive effect of both prebiotics (ex: inulin, fructooligosaccharides (FOS) and probiotics on the absorption of minerals. This occurs several ways: through increased solubility of minerals because of increased bacterial production of short-chain fatty acids; fermentation of bacteria increases the number of gut cells which then increase the amount of absorptive surface; increased function of calcium-binding proteins; improved gut health; reduction in mineral-binding phytic acid; and release of phytoestrogens from foods.

References omitted for space consideration. Available by request.

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