

Probiotics

Missing Piece for Weight Control?

by Margy Squires

Did you know that there are 100 times more genes in your GI tract microbiome than in the human genome? Genes are known as the *blueprint for life* because they instruct your cells what to do and when to do it. This is an interesting

concept when it comes to your GI tract – often called the second brain as this ecosystem is influenced by the food you eat and in turn affects your response to food. So if you’ve been wondering why you eat lean and your weight is resistant to change, perhaps you need to look closer at the billions of friendly bacteria inside this microbiome!

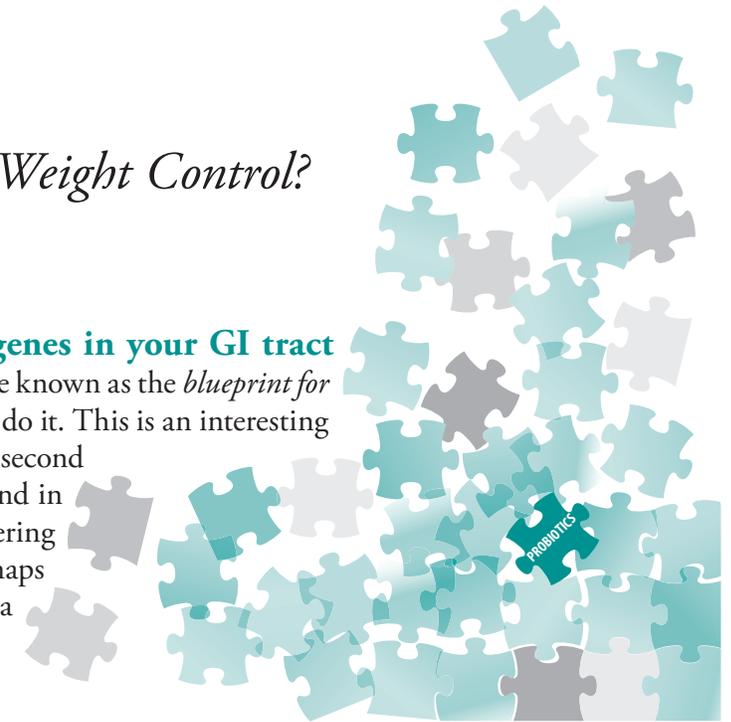
Of course each person’s ecosystem differs from the next. But how different? Since the link to obesity and blood sugar control is strong, researchers decided to start with a look at diet, particularly blood sugar response. An estimated 70% of people with “pre-diabetes” eventually develop the disease.¹ Poor glycemic control is also linked to a risk of metabolic syndrome, with markers of obesity, hypertension, non-alcoholic fatty liver disease, high triglycerides and cardiovascular disease.² Maintaining a normal blood glucose is considered “critical for preventing and controlling the metabolic syndrome”.³ In an impressive 800 participant study Dr. Zeevi and his colleagues learned more about the blood sugar-food connection.⁴



You’d be surprised as the researchers were with the results. For some, blood sugars rose in response to sushi and not ice cream, an expected culprit. The participants’ blood sugars were monitored using a subcutaneous sensor (iPro2) for 130,000 hours and 1.56 million measurements; an app to track physical activity, sleep and diet (time and amount of 48,986 meals); and stool samples also taken. The study lasted one week.

Taking all these statistics into account, the researchers came up with an algorithm that successfully predicted glycemic response of a normal diet in a group of 100 new subjects. Why is this important? Call it a “gut reaction”.

At a recent Phoenix conference, Dr. Rob Knight, biologist, published author and professor at UC San Diego, spoke about Zeevi’s study and his own “gut” findings. Based on *system biology* (the whole being is greater than the one part), Knight stresses the importance of looking at the ecosystem. He can



predict with 99% accuracy whether you are lean or obese based on your microbiome profiles. One of Knight’s research studies transplanted gut bacteria from obese humans to mice and the mice gained weight and fat deposits.⁴ Interestingly, when obese people lost weight, their microflora reverted back to that of a lean person.³ Clearly, the genes could be manipulated to act “obese” or “lean”.

Although the gene pool in the GI is high, Knight states we shouldn’t be looking at genes for the answer. “Modifying the microbiome may be responsible”. Knight adds that antibiotic use and diet contribute to the problem by negatively altering this ecosystem. Weight and fat gain change the metabolism of the gut. Getting lean changes it back. Maybe food and diet are only pieces of the equation, and not the whole picture.

Much research has been done on the GI tract, showing benefits for immunity, inflammatory response, heart, brain and oral mucosa. Now it appears that obesity can be added to the list. Probiotic supplements add the friendly bacteria back to the ecosystem to foster a healthy, functioning microbiome. **Bottom Line:** Make sure your GI tract is as healthy as can be, not just for weight purposes but for all the other benefits too!

Resources: 1) Nathan et al., 2007. 2) Grundy 2012. 3) Zeevi et al., 2015. 4) Gordon, Knight et al., 2013. 5) Gordon et al., 2006.

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