



To Your Health The “Friends” That Live Within Us

An increasingly “hot” topic in health news is the study of our **Microbiome** – which is a fancy term for the normal or “healthy” bacteria that lives in our intestines. If you recall, we had a 3 part series on a healthy digestive system earlier this year, so today we will continue the discussion on ways to support your digestive health.

It is estimated that our bodies host more than 100 trillion bacteria – or about 3 times as many organisms as the body has human cells. These are the “good guys” that aid in the breakdown of food, absorption of nutrients, regulation of bowel habits, and help support the immune system. They are necessary to support life – and health for all living creatures. When an imbalance occurs where either many of the normal/good bacteria are destroyed – or there is an increase of unhealthy/bad bacteria a condition arises that is known as **dysbiosis**. So how to get things back to normal if that balance is disturbed – or better yet – prevent the imbalance from occurring in the first place?

Eat right – your health depends on a diet rich in nutrients that supports the “inner you.” Along with proteins, carbohydrates, fats, and vitamins, you need fiber, **Probiotics** and **Prebiotics** to keep your insides operating without causing pain, bloating or irregularity.

Probiotics are live bacteria and yeasts that are found in certain foods and have been found to be good for your health – especially your digestive system. There’s nothing wrong with supplements, but most authorities recommend getting as many nutrients from natural sources as possible, including Probiotics that can be found in foods such as; yogurt, unpasteurized buttermilk, fermented foods, such as fresh sauerkraut, miso soup, soft cheeses (like Gouda), kefir, or kimchee.

If your doctor recommends using a supplement in addition to dietary sources, choose one that contains several strains of both Lactobacillus and Bifidobacterium as this will help achieve a better balance. Also, check for the UPS Verified seal to insure purity. Drug store and Health Food Markets have shelves full of Probiotics, so read labels carefully and check the expiration date. Because these are “live” cultures, they should never be used if they are past date, or the capsules appear to have turned dark.

So – everyone’s heard of Probiotics – but what are **Prebiotics** and why are they important? Prebiotics help nourish the Probiotics that are already in you intestines by encouraging the growth of the “good” bacteria already in the gut and helping maintain balance. They can be found in foods such as oatmeal and other whole grains, and a variety of fruits and vegetables, including artichokes, asparagus, onions, garlic, leeks, bananas, or other food that are fermentable. Prebiotics also contain Fiber that aids in bowel regularity.

To review:

Eat a balanced diet high in fiber rich fruits, vegetables, and dairy. Not only will this help your digestive system, but has also been shown to reduce inflammation and may also guard against certain diseases, such as heart disease and cancer. Also to help maintain regularity, be sure to get adequate fluid intake. Some Gastroenterologists are now recommending the use of Probiotics as an adjunct treatment for Irritable Bowel Syndrome. So if you have this condition, you may want to check with your doctor.

A few additional points to make in keeping a “Healthy Microbiome”:

Don’t overuse antibiotics! If an infection occurs, have your doctor insure that it is something that is treatable with antibiotics before taking them. Then, take as prescribed for the full length of time recommended.

If you take an antibiotic, it’s going to kill both good and bad bacterium and you may need to take a supplement to restore the “good” and get things back in balance.

Hand washing is the best prevention from exposure to “bad bugs,” so hand washing before meals and after using the bathroom or then touching things that might be contaminated is your best defense. Over use of antibacterial products are proving to be more harmful than helpful.

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