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The Story Of 'biotics And Your Health

The role of pre, pro, and antibiotics in health and medicine.

Most people have taken antibiotics to get rid of a bacterial infection. While those medications have their place, it has also come to light that overprescribing and inappropriately taking antibiotics can negatively impact what is now understood to be very important bacterial colonies that live inside our gut and on our bodies. Collectively called the microbiome, the bacteria cells inside our bodies outnumber human cells by at least 10 to one, scientists estimate. This microbiome is very diverse and contains strains of good bacteria commonly referred to as probiotic bacteria. Researchers are just beginning to understand how and why the microbiome is important for human health.

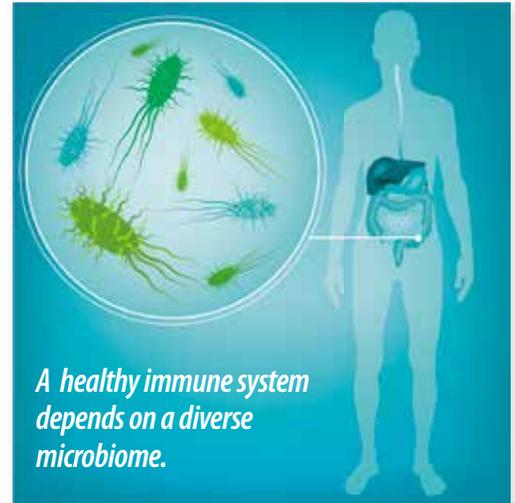
“High microbiome diversity may help protect us from illness,” explains Kirsten Tillisch, MD, associate professor of medicine, UCLA Oppenheimer Center for Neurobiology of Stress and Resilience, Division of Digestive Diseases. “It is particularly important for seniors to support a healthy microbiome by eating a diverse diet with plenty of fruits and vegetables because as we age our microbiome becomes less diverse.”

A loss in diversity could lead to increased risk of diseases or symptoms—making it ever more important to keep the bacterial colonies themselves healthy and well fed.

You Need Prebiotics to Support Probiotics

Probiotic bacteria, like all living organisms, need a food source. And that food source comes from prebiotics. Without enough prebiotics, the beneficial probiotic bacterial colonies can dwindle, leaving room for harmful bacteria to take over.

So, it's important to nourish the gut microbiome with the right foods. Prebiotic foods generally include those that are high in fiber.



- Prebiotic foods include:
- Chicory
 - Jerusalem artichoke
 - Legumes including lentils, lima beans, chickpeas, red beans, soy products
 - Resistant starches, which are found in whole grains, cooked and cooled pasta, rice and potatoes
- While probiotics are getting the praise for their impact on health, they couldn't do it without the supporting role that prebiotics play.

A Closer Look at Bacteria and the Ecosystem

It's not currently possible to follow all the millions of bacterial strains that swirl inside our gut on a daily basis. To better understand how bacteria influence health, scientists are isolating specific strains to see what impacts they may have. One of the most well-known of these bacterial strains is *Lactobacillus rhamnosus* GG (LGG). This strain of bacteria, which is part of many popular probiotic products, has a reputation as a health-promoting bacteria. Researchers have found evidence that they can help with intestinal problems, respiratory infections and

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skin disorders. Some research suggests that they may even help with weight loss.

According to researchers at the University of Maryland School of Medicine (UM SOM), it appears that LGG may act as a facilitator, modifying the activity of other gut bacteria. In a small study, researchers analyzed the gut bacteria of study participants who ingested LGG twice a day for 28 days. They found that LGG fostered several species of microbes beneficial to health. The paper, *Functional Dynamics of the Gut Microbiome in Elderly People during Probiotic Consumption*, was published in the April 2015 issue of the journal *mBio*.

"It is a new idea that some probiotics may work by affecting the overall ecosystem of the gut," says Claire M Fraser, PhD, professor of medicine at the UM SOM, and director of the

Institute for Genome Sciences. "Previously we tended to think that LGG and other probiotics worked directly on the host. I think this finding has many exciting implications." According to Dr. Fraser it lends support to the idea that we need to look at the microbes in the gut as an interconnected ecosystem rather than a series of solitary bacteria. Modifying the behavior of microbes already in the gut may be just as important as adding any single species to this population.

Antibiotics Pros and Cons

Antibiotics are absolutely essential, life-saving medications for specific infections. But unfortunately some doctors and patients have used antibiotics in situations when they are not necessary, such as mild upper respiratory infections or sinus symptoms. This overuse of antibiotics can take a toll on your microbiome.

"While the microbiome usually

WHAT YOU CAN DO

- **Fortify** your diet with prebiotics and probiotics by eating a variety of foods.
- **Try** adding kefir, yogurt or other fermented foods with active probiotic strains to your diet.
- **Eat** high-fiber foods daily, as they are the fuel source for probiotics.
- **Take** antibiotics as prescribed only when medically needed.

bounces back in a few months, sometimes it does not and it is possible for the changes to lead to new symptoms," explains Dr. Tillisch.

As for taking probiotics to counterbalance the undesirable affects of antibiotics, according to Dr. Tillisch, there's not yet enough evidence to show that it's effective. The best advice is to use antibiotics with caution and only when truly necessary. ■

PREVENTION



The Health Benefits of Staying Positive

Three easy ways to cultivate more joy and happiness.

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Simple practices can rewire your mind for positivity.

A positive attitude can lower blood pressure, reduce risk for heart disease, and help better control blood sugar levels. Helping people cultivate positive emotions is front and center for Natalie Bell, a certified mindfulness instructor for the UCLA Mindful Awareness Research Center (MARC). "Mindfulness and self-compassion practices have been shown to boost optimism in our daily lives," says Bell. "With practice, we can influence how we feel about ourselves and our experiences."

To follow are three simple methods Bell uses in her various workshops. Incorporating just one of these practices into your daily life can make a difference in a short period of time.

1 Listen to Your Inner Voice

Constant negative reinforcement diminishes self-worth and self-esteem. When you find your inner voice is harsh or critical, pause and replace those words with a supportive voice. Imagine what you might say to a friend or young person who was so critical about himself or herself. Then direct those loving words toward yourself.

2 Accept That You Are Human

Don't judge yourself for having a harsh self-critic—it is part of human conditioning. Since negativity is our default setting it will take practice to retrain the brain for positivity. Practice with patience. "The brain has a negativity bias and we tend to think about things going wrong more often,"

explains Bell, "Using simple strategies, we find anecdotally that within six weeks many people in the class are focusing more on where and how they can be more positive."

3 Gratitude: Three Blessings

Martin Seligman is a former president of the American Psychological Association and the founder of the positive psychology movement. Among his many exercises for tuning the body toward happiness is this nightly ritual of writing down three things that went well and why. For example, acknowledging that your spouse made your favorite breakfast because she or he can be a considerate, loving person.

Communicating your gratefulness to another person can also work wonders for relationships. According to a recent study from the University of Georgia, researchers reported that spousal expression of gratitude was a significant predictor of marital quality. The recent study was published in the journal *Personal Relationships*. ■