

Probiotics & You

What is a microbiome? - Microbes are tiny living organisms – bacteria, fungi, yeast. We have millions of microbes all over our body - on our skin, in our mouth & nose, in our intestines. We can't see them, but these microbes help us maintain our health and fight off disease. Collectively, these microbes make-up our microbiome. Our microbiome is unique, just like our fingerprints.

Why does our microbiome matter? – A number of health conditions and chronic diseases have been linked to the make-up of our microbiome including depression, obesity, diabetes, allergies, autoimmune diseases, brain diseases, Crohn's, and more. An area where “good” bacteria can have a positive impact on overall health is our gut microbiome.

What can I do to build a healthy gut? – Studies have shown that by changing our diet, we can change our gut. This could lead to improved immunity, lower inflammation & overall better health. We do this by:

- Increasing consumption of “good” bacteria (probiotics).
- Creating an environment in our gut where the “good” bacteria will flourish. Gut bacteria love to eat fiber. So, by eating a variety of dietary fiber each day, we give the “good” bacteria the food they love.
 - Soluble/fermentable fiber - (such as onions, oats, beans, fruits, and veggies)
 - Insoluble fiber – (such as whole grains, nuts, fruits, and veggies)

Where can I get good bacteria (probiotics)? –

Dietary Sources of probiotics include fermented milk products (such as yogurt, kefir, and buttermilk), fermented vegetables (such as kimchi and sauerkraut), and fermented soy products (such as miso & tempeh). Include these foods in your diet, if not daily, at least 3x's per week.

Take a probiotic supplement if you are not getting enough probiotic foods daily. Remember, nutrients should come from food first. If you don't eat enough fermented foods on a regular basis, talk to your doctor about taking a supplement, especially if you have any pre-existing gut issues. If you are fighting something such as antibiotic associated diarrhea, you may need to take a supplement to get enough probiotics to counter the effects.

Meals on Wheels – A hot, nutritious meal is the basis of the Meals on Wheels Program. Each of our meals meets at least 1/3 of the Daily Recommended Dietary Allowance for the population we serve. The meals contain on average ~8.6 grams of fiber. We should strive for 25-30 grams of fiber each day. Remember, “good” bacteria like to eat fiber!

Tips for Incorporating Probiotics into your Diet:

- Daily consumption of probiotic foods & dietary fiber together is beneficial (i.e., yogurt with a banana; asparagus and tempeh stir-fry; a Reuben sandwich with sauerkraut on rye bread).
- Yogurt is a cost-effective way to get probiotics daily & is easy to consume. Add your own fruit for fiber! Look for the “*Live & Active Cultures Seal*” established by the *National Yogurt Association*.
- Take a probiotic supplement in combination with food. This decreases the acidity of the stomach, which is a more favorable environment for probiotic survival.
- Avoid excessive intake of overly processed foods. Excess sugar intake can disrupt the balance of healthy bacteria, as well as a healthy gut environment, negating the benefits of probiotics.
- Individuals who are immunocompromised, recovering from surgery, undergoing cancer treatment, or have compromised gut integrity are at a greater risk of infection and should take probiotics only under medical supervision.

Info. adapted from: Collins, Sonya. What is Your Gut Telling You? WebMD. Available at: <http://www.webmd.com/digestive-disorders/news/20140820/your-gut-bacteria>

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