

An overview of the importance of supplemental probiotics in support of good health

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Definition

The word probiotic means “for life”. Probiotics are beneficial bacteria that are used to redress and maintain the balance of the microflora, which can become unbalanced due to stress, illness, or as a result of the use of antibiotics. By rebalancing the microflora, health can be maintained or substantially improved.

The hierarchy of supplements

We all know how important vitamins and minerals are to health. Some vitamins despite their original definition can be manufactured in the body. Of these only vitamin D is made in the body itself the rest are all manufactured by the bacteria in the gut and so for these vitamins the health of the bacteria colonies in the gut is an important source. Not even the bacteria can manufacture minerals but they can help improve their availability by partly digesting them and adding carrier proteins to the minerals to help take them through the gut wall into the body. With regards to essential fatty acids (EFAs) the story is less clear but there certainly has been some research showing that probiotics may enhance the function of EFAs.

Naturally there are many other compounds or phytonutrients within food that are best provided by the diet rather than supplements. Within the realm of traditional supplements it can clearly be shown that it is the probiotics, which underpin the others and form a foundation for good health.

Although a broad spectrum of all nutrients allowing your body the freedom to choose the ones it needs on an ongoing basis is vital for good health in terms of direct supplementation it is clear that the following represents the hierarchy of importance.

1. Probiotics
2. Minerals
3. Vitamins and Essential Fatty Acids
4. Phytonutrients
5. Other specific requirements

The functions of probiotics

There are many different functions of probiotics, as there are many different species of these friendly bacteria, but essentially we look at probiotics to do two things:

- 1) Support a healthy environment in the digestive tract
- 2) Support the functioning of the immune system.

The digestive tract

Our bowels operate best in a slightly acidic environment which is logical when one considers that the probiotics manufacture lactic acid and this replenishing of the acid stock in the gut helps keep the probiotics happy and the unfriendly bacteria unhappy which is just the way we want it. Given plenty of food the friendly bacteria will then quite merrily proliferate and support our digestion and health in general.

The immune system

Much of the research into the functionality of probiotics focuses upon their role within the immune system. Principally these bacteria act as our first line of defence against the outside world. By helping to break down food and neutralise allergens they help to reduce the possibility of allergic or sensitive reactions to common molecules that healthy bodies with healthy bacteria should not be sensitive too. The bacteria also help switch our immune system between red alert and the normal standby mode as needed. Over sensitive people often have immune systems on red alert all the time, which causes many problems. In brief it is clear therefore how fundamental to good and balanced health an active population of friendly bacteria are to our bodies.

Conclusion

With approximately 10 times as many bacterial cells in our guts as cells in the entire of the rest of our bodies it is not surprising the probiotics can have such a positive influence on our health. It is therefore important to supplement these important bacteria with the best probiotic supplement you can find.

Use probiotics as the foundation of your supplemental programme and you will not only be working with your body but also supporting the billions of helpful bacteria that we rely on to maintain good health.