Probiotic/Prebiotic Combo Found to Help Patients with Crohn's Disease

By Greg Arnold, DC, CSCS, August 29, 2007, abstracted from “High dose probiotic and prebiotic cotherapy for remission induction of active Crohn’s disease” in the August 2007 issue of the Journal of Gastroenterology and Hepatology


Probiotics are defined as “viable microorganisms with beneficial physiological or therapeutic properties”. They are the “good bacteria” that bestow a number of healthful properties, including helping protect against traveling sickness,¹ and helping maintain immune system health,² digestive health³ and liver health.⁴

But to get the most out of probiotics, it is necessary to also take prebiotics, the “dietary components that foster the growth of beneficial bacteria.” In short, prebiotics are the food that allows probiotics to grow but have also been found to help maintain bone health.⁵

Research has consistently found probiotics to help patients with another digestive problem called ulcerative colitis.⁶, ⁷, ⁸ But the same can’t be said for Crohn’s Disease (CD), for which some studies have found benefits of probiotics for CD⁹, ¹⁰ but others haven’t.¹¹, ¹²

But now a new study¹³ has found that combining probiotics with prebiotics can be very effective for patients with CD.

In the study, 10 patients were given either a placebo or a probiotic supplement (Bifidobacterium breve - 30 billion colony forming units (CFU), Lactobacillus casei - 30 billion CFU and Bifidobacterium longum - 15 billion CFU) combined with a prebiotic supplement consisting of 3.3 g of psyllium dissolved in 100 mL of water. The patients took the probiotic supplement once per day and the prebiotic supplement three times per day for between 13-17 months.

To measure the effectiveness of the supplements, the patients filled out a form called the CDAI questionnaire that measures pain and symptoms of CD. The researchers found that at the end of the study, those in the supplement group had drops in CDAI scores (and therefore improved CD symptoms) of as much as 79%, with 6 patients experiencing remission of all CD symptoms. While one patient had an increased CDAI score, it was only a 1% increase.

For the researchers, this “showed the clinical usefulness of [probiotic-prebiotic] therapy in the treatment of active CD” and that “high-dose probiotic and prebiotic cotherapy can be safely and effectively used for the treatment of active CD.”

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