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Probiotics

There are more bacteria living in and on us, than we have human cells. Most of these live in our gut, especially within our colon or large bowel. It is increasingly understood that bacteria are necessary for normal human health and development. Links have been found between changes in our bacterial populations (dysbiosis) and a wide variety of different health disorders, both gastrointestinal and otherwise. Naturally this has led to much interest in products which might improve our bacteria, or restore a 'good' balance of bacterial species within our gut. The term 'probiotic' is taken to mean a health-improving product which contains 'friendly bacteria', intended for ingestion and delivery into the gut. There remains a lot to learn within this fascinating and complex area of study. These are some of the important questions we do not know the answers to:

1. What is the best method to measure our bacteria?
2. Which species should a healthy person have, and how many of each?
3. What is the best way to measure bacterial imbalance or overgrowth of 'bad' species?
4. In which conditions are probiotics beneficial?
5. Which probiotics are the best?
6. How much should you take and how long for?

Evidence exists that probiotics may be useful in certain functional bowel disorders, especially those within the irritable bowel syndrome (IBS) spectrum and in whom bloating, gas, diarrhoea and erratic bowel habit are prominent symptoms. There is *no* evidence that probiotics are harmful. Studies show that after the individual finishes taking a probiotic their bacterial composition reverts to its original state. This might quite reasonably lead to a natural inclination to 'give it a go'.

There are some brands of yoghurt marketed as probiotics, and while these may be tasty they contain a lot of sugar, a high dairy load (which may or may not be relevant) and in fact many of them have been shown to result in no change at all to the bacterial populations of the individual who ingests them.

Therefore when referring to probiotics in a therapeutic or medical sense we mean a product in liquid, capsule or sachet form. Most of these cannot be prescribed as they are classed as a food supplement rather than a drug, therefore they need to be sourced from health food stores, chemists or online and can be expensive. There are plenty of reputable brands available and much will depend on the formulation your child individually prefers. Some brands that we have good experience with include Bio-Kult, Optibac, BioGaia, Symprove, Biocare, VSL#3. This is by no means an exhaustive list.

A sensible approach would be to give the probiotic every day for 4-8 weeks and review its impact on symptoms. It is important when evaluating subjective treatments such as this, not to change any other aspect of the child's regime at the same time, i.e. keep the diet and other medications the same, so that any effect of each intervention can be understood in isolation as far as possible.

Dr Epstein greatly values your feedback and always strives to improve. She would really appreciate if you find a few moments to visit this link and leave a review of the care she provided to your child.

<http://bit.ly/doctifyJenny> (case sensitive)