

The Newsletter of The Executive RegistrySM

Health News

Spring/Summer 2011



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Probiotics in Gastrointestinal Health and Disease

First some definitions: A *probiotic* (literally a word meaning “for life”) is scientifically defined as *live* microorganisms that confer a health benefit on the host. Although most probiotics are bacteria, one strain of yeast, *Saccharomyces boulardii*, has been found to be an effective probiotic. *Prebiotics* are nutrients (often oligosaccharides, which are polymers of simple sugars) that enhance the growth of good bacteria in the intestine. *Antibiotics* are substances (think of penicillin) produced by bacteria, yeast, and other organisms, that can destroy or inhibit the growth of other microorganisms. There is a centuries-long tradition of probiotics (think of yogurt with live and active cultures) being used in various parts of the world to promote digestive health and treat diseases. They are now readily available in commercially prepared forms in pharmacies, health food stores, and over the Internet without a prescription. In the last decade a body of scientific evidence has developed suggesting that these organisms may actually truly be good for you and may play a role in the treatment of a variety of intestinal mucosal conditions such as diarrhea, inflammatory bowel disease, and even food allergies.

How do probiotics work? All human beings have a very large number of microbes residing inside the body, particularly in the mouth, the gastrointestinal tract (the most heavily populated), the respiratory tract, and

the vagina, as well as microbes attached to the body on the skin. It has been estimated that the human body may contain more bacteria than human cells. In the beginning of the 20th century, decades before the discovery of antibiotics, Russian scientist and Nobel laureate Ilya Ilyich Metchnikoff, (1908 co-recipient of the Nobel Prize in Physiology or Medicine), at the time a professor at the Pasteur Institute in Paris, suggested that it would be possible to modify the gut flora and replace harmful bacteria with healthy ones. Metchnikoff thought that doing this might slow the physical changes in the body that accompany the aging process. It has now been confirmed that some of the 1,000 different species of bacteria residing within the human body play a vital role in human health, while others may negatively impact health. Changes in intestinal microbial populations have been correlated with many diseases of remote organs, such as diabetes, asthma, obesity, cancer, autism, and even depression. The fact that the affected organs are not in direct contact with the gut microbes suggests that chemical signals may be involved. A major, but perhaps not the only, role of probiotic bacteria and yeast is to establish a barrier that prevents harmful bacteria and viruses from multiplying in the body. Thus, probiotic microorganisms might be regarded as microscopic defenders protecting the human body from invading organisms.

Other studies suggest diverse mechanisms by which gut microbes may influence bodily functions through the activities of small molecules released into the body from these organisms.

Probiotics are known to break down foods for digestion, produce the lactase enzyme (some people have a deficiency of this enzyme) that breaks down the milk sugar lactose, produce vitamins in the digestive tract, help to prevent the diarrhea that often accompanies antibiotic use, and change the chemistry of the interior of the intestine to create a less desirable environment for harmful microorganisms to inhabit. They are used to treat patients with inflammatory bowel disease (ulcerative colitis and Crohn's disease).

Probiotics may be useful in treating irritable bowel syndrome, a common digestive disorder affecting one out of five adults in the United States. IBS is characterized by abdominal pain, cramping, and changes in normal bowel function, including bloating, gaseousness, diarrhea, and constipation. IBS is a functional disorder diagnosed by excluding the presence of other digestive conditions: there are no structural abnormalities seen on X-rays or endoscopy, and blood test findings are normal. At least two studies published in peer-reviewed medical journals have shown the probiotic *Bifidobacterium infantis* to be helpful in reducing

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Dining Out on Your Own Terms

For most people life is stressful enough . . . trying to balance work, finances, family, friends, and all the other challenges in life. Staying healthy may also be a challenge for you, especially if you eat out. Whether your restaurant visits are for relaxing with friends and family or for business lunches, here are some simple guidelines for eating out while maintaining your healthy diet.

- 1. Plan ahead.** Choose restaurants with varied menus to increase your chances of finding healthy food items. Avoid all-you-can eat buffets and Sunday brunches where you might overeat. If possible, check out the menu on the Internet before you go. Have in mind what you will order so it will be easier for you to make a healthy choice when the waiter stops by your table.
- 2. Seek out nutrition information.** Some restaurants will display nutrition facts on the menu or on their website. Also, check out www.healthydiningfinder.com or other websites for information on restaurants with healthy choices in your area.
- 3. Monitor your hunger.** Avoid being too hungry when you arrive at the restaurant. It makes it more difficult to make a healthy choice. You may find yourself ordering (and eating) too much food if you are too hungry.
- 4. Interpret the language of the menu.** Foods that are “fried,” “au gratin,” “crispy,” “scaloped,” “pan-fried,” “sautéed,” “battered,” “creamed,” or “stuffed” are high in fat and calories. Look for “steamed,” “broiled,” “baked,” “grilled,” “poached,” or “roasted” foods instead. If you need to limit your sodium intake, avoid foods that are “pickled,” “smoked,” or “cooked in broth.”
- 5. Make it colorful!** Order meals that include vegetables or fruits as major components. To keep fat and calories in check, request vegetables be

steamed without the addition of butter, oil, or cream sauce. Ask for extra lettuce and tomato (or other vegetables) on sandwiches and burgers. Request an extra serving of vegetables as a side dish. Have a dinner salad to start your meal.

- 6. Be assertive.** If it is not clear from the menu, ask your server about how the food is prepared, the type of oil that is used (if any), and the ingredients the dish contains.
- 7. Special requests.** You may also want to ask your server if the restaurant honors special requests such as:
 - a. Dressings and sauces “on the side”;
 - b. Entrée and side dishes prepared with no oil or butter;
 - c. Healthy substitutions, such as a steamed vegetable or baked potato on the side instead of French fries or mashed potatoes;
 - d. Changes in cooking methods. If ordering grilled vegetables, which we think of as healthy, ask how they are grilled. Butter? Oil? Ask for them to be made with little or no added fats.
- 8. Stay mindful of portions.** If you go to a restaurant where the portions are large, ask if smaller portions are available or whether you can share entrées with a companion. If smaller portions aren't available, ask for a to-go box when you order and place half the entrée in the box to eat later. You can also try eating appetizers as the main course. When ordering a sandwich, order it on regular whole wheat sliced bread, not rolls or baguettes that might be several servings



of bread. Consider a half sandwich if the portions are large.

- 9. It isn't just the entrée.** Keep in mind that what you eat before the entrée counts, too. We often forget to count the baskets of bread or chips, the appetizers, or the bowl of soup, as part of the meal. Adding these foods can often double your calorie intake.
- 10. Skip the dessert menu.** Order fresh fruit or fruit sorbet instead.
- 11. Eat slowly.** Meal times should be a time for you to relax and enjoy nourishing your body and spending time with your companions. There is no need to rush. When you eat slowly, you give your body enough time to feel full, and you will likely eat less.
- 12. Drink more water and less soda, juice, or alcohol.** Juice and regular soda generally have the same number of calories, so if you are “waist-watching” avoid them. Alcohol has at least 100 calories per drink; mixed drinks can have 2 or 3 times that. If you choose to have that drink, have just one, then switch to water.
- 13. Stop eating when full.** The moment you feel a sense of fullness in your stomach, try pausing for a few minutes, drink some water, then ask yourself if you need more food to feel satisfied. If you are satisfied, take the rest home for a later meal . . . you'll probably enjoy it more the next day when you are actually hungry again!

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Ultraviolet Safety Month

In recognition of May's designation as UV safety month, the American Academy of Ophthalmology is urging Americans to protect their eyes by wearing sunglasses—the right kind of sunglasses.

Exposure to bright sunlight can increase the risk of developing cataracts and macular degeneration, two of the leading causes of vision loss among older adults.

Natural light can damage the surface of the eye (cornea), or the inner lining of the eye (retina). Excessive exposure to ultraviolet rays reflected off sand, snow, and pavement can also damage the cornea. Similar to a sunburn on the skin, corneal ultraviolet injuries may also be quite painful.

Sandra Belmont, M.D., director of the cornea service and laser vision surgeon at Weill Cornell states: *"Simply wearing dark sunglasses when outdoors is not a*

solution, and may cause more harm than good if the glasses do not have proper UV protection. The pupil enlarges in order to let in more light when we wear dark glasses. Consequently, more of the sun's harmful UV rays may also enter, if not blocked".

We recommend the following:

- Select sunglasses that block ultraviolet rays. Look for glasses that block out 99 or 100% of all UV light. Some manufacturer's labels say "UV protection up to 400nm." This is the same as 100% UV absorption. Do not be deceived by color or cost, as the ability to block out UV light is not dependent on the darkness, or price of the lenses.
- Use sunglasses that wrap all the way around your temples, so that the sun's

rays will not enter from the sides.

- You also need to protect your eyes from acute damage caused by single outings on very bright days, in addition to protecting yourself from the cumulative damage of repeated exposure.
- Remember to wear your sunglasses, even if you wear contacts with UV protection.

"Sunglasses should be worn at all times when outdoors. During the summer, the level of ultraviolet radiation (UVA and UVB) is at least three times higher than during the winter."

Always wear your UV protective sunglasses when at the beach or on the water; when participating in winter sports (especially at high altitudes); and when using any medications that can cause photosensitivity.

Choosing a Pair of Sunglasses

Ultraviolet Protection:

Always buy glasses with this feature. UVB radiation is considered more harmful to eyes and skin than UVA radiation. Look for glasses that block 99 or 100% of all UV light.

Infrared Protection:

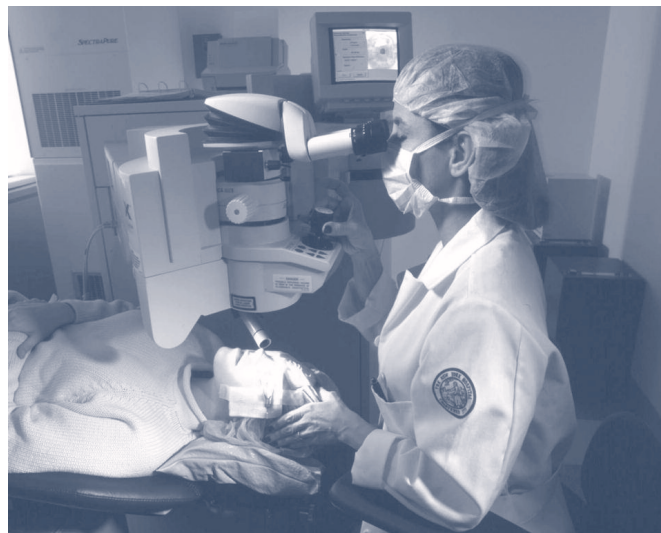
Some manufacturers make health claims for their products based on infrared protection, but research has not shown a close connection between eye disease and infrared rays.

Blue Blocking:

It has not been established that blue light is particularly harmful to the eye. Lenses that block blue light are usually amber in color, and make your surroundings look yellow-orange. Some feel that the tint makes distant objects more distinct in snow or haze.

Polarized:

These lenses cut reflective glare, the light that bounces off smooth surfaces, like cars or pavement, and can help while driving.



Sandra Belmont, M.D., F.A.C.S., is internationally recognized as a leading investigator in the first FDA studies in laser vision correction in the United States, and an investigator in techniques to reverse presbyopia. Doctor Belmont served as the Founding Director of the Laser Vision Correction Center at New York-Presbyterian Hospital/Weill Cornell Medical Center.

A Primer on Primary Care

A primary care physician is a doctor who takes care of a patient's overall health care needs. He or she is a person's first point of contact for health care, providing preventive care, physicals, routine tests, immunizations, and the treatment of acute illnesses or conditions that do not require a specialist. Family doctors, pediatricians, and internists are all primary care physicians. For many older patients, a family doctor or internist who has had additional training in geriatrics may serve as a primary care physician.

Because of the unique role they play in overseeing a person's overall health care needs, primary care physicians are critical to both individual health and wellness, and to the efficiency of the health care system as a whole.

Eisenhower Medical Center's Joseph Scherger, MD, MPH, a family physician and Vice President for Primary Care, says a primary care physician is the doctor who takes care of all of you, over time. "A primary care physician's responsibility is to care for a patient's body, mind, and spirit," Dr. Scherger explains. "They really should be everyone's first point of contact for the coordination of care. A primary care physician may be able to handle 85 percent of someone's health care issues. For the other 15 percent, a person might need to see specialists, but it is the primary care physician who determines that need and can make that referral."

Women often use their gynecologists as primary care physicians. Together, primary care physicians and gynecologists can offer complementary care that supports a woman's overall health and well-being, including monitoring a patient's cardiovascular system and other internal functions.

While primary care physicians serve as the first point of contact to the health care

system, their role in their patients' care does not stop if someone needs to see a specialist. According to Dr. Scherger, it is crucial for primary care physicians to stay involved as part of the overall medical team if someone has a serious medical condition such as cancer or cardiovascular disease.

"If someone is referred to a specialist, it is important for it not to be just a hand-off from one doctor to another," explains Dr. Scherger. "There should be a lot of shared care going on, especially if people have a specific problem. They may have a

regular cardiologist who they see if they have cardiovascular issues, but a primary care physician is for everything else—prostate exams, pap smears, immunizations. They may have other concerns that the primary care physician can address. A primary care physician will look at the complete picture, and ensure that a patient is getting all of the medical care that they need."

Joseph Scherger, MD, MPH
Vice President of Primary Care
Eisenhower Medical Center

Probiotics in Gastrointestinal Health and Disease

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abdominal pain, bloating, incomplete evacuation, straining, and gaseousness in patients diagnosed with irritable bowel syndrome.

Possible future uses of probiotics in the pediatric patient population include their use to prevent day care center diseases, their use as adjuvant therapy in treating children with ulcerative colitis and Crohn's disease, and in the prevention and treatment of childhood diarrhea. When scientifically studied, the beneficial effects of probiotics in these conditions have been attributed to the restoration of intestinal permeability and the restoration of balance to the gut microflora, improvement of the intestine's immunological barrier functions, and amelioration of the intestinal inflammatory response.

Even though the majority of published data involve the use of probiotics to treat and prevent gastrointestinal conditions, the potential benefit of these microorganisms may extend far beyond

what was originally conceptualized. Beyond the gut, studies have demonstrated a possible role for *Bifidobacterium animalis* BB-12 and *Lactobacillus* GG as treatments to modify the allergic inflammation occurring in infants with atopic eczema. More studies are necessary before probiotics will be routinely recommended for allergic and inflammatory conditions.

The scientific community continues to explore roles for probiotics in the prevention and treatment of diseases and the long-term effects of their use. Might probiotics be of use in treating your ailments? Given the various advertising claims made for probiotics and the lack of their regulation as medications by the Food and Drug Administration, it is best to consult your physician for individualized information.

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Freezing Fat—A New Noninvasive Technique to Remove Resistant Pockets of Fat

For many people, the fact that summer is approaching means it's time to start doing leg lifts and crunches to reduce those little pockets of stubborn fat before being seen in a bathing suit. New noninvasive cosmetic procedures can provide body-contouring results just not possible with those leg lifts. Dr. Mathew Avram, Director of the Massachusetts General Hospital Dermatology Laser & Cosmetic Center, discussed several of these new options.

"There is an emerging clinical ability to noninvasively remove fat. In other words you can remove fat from someone without cutting into the skin. With some of these devices you don't need anesthesia, or even topical anesthesia, and they can be done with a minimal amount of down time. These new technologies don't compare in terms of the amount of fat removal you'll get with liposuction; however the convenience and relative safety are important features. [Technologies include] radio frequency, ultrasound, laser, and the application of cooling."

These fat reduction methods are not intended for significant weight loss, but for someone who is physically fit and within 10 to 15 pounds of ideal weight, they provide an alternative to struggling with that last little bit of fat.

Dr. Avram explained how the cooling technique works. "The fat cells in your body, especially right beneath the skin, are more cold sensitive than the surrounding skin. That fact is being used to effect a form of noninvasive fat

removal called Cryolipolysis,TM or CoolSculpting.TM"

The Food and Drug Administration cleared CryolipolysisTM in August, 2010. It works by cooling areas of fat accumulation, and has the effect of gradually reducing and removing some of the fat itself over a period of 2 to 3 months. This effect is identical to one known as "Popsicle Panniculitis" in which young children temporarily lose focal areas of fat after sucking on popsicles. In studies, CryolipolysisTM results in approximately a 23 percent reduction of the fat layer in the targeted area.

Treatment is simple and most people report minimal discomfort. The device is positioned over the targeted area, with the patient comfortably lying down or seated. The patient feels a tug as the bulge to be removed is drawn up between the cooling panels. The cooling effect is directed to the fat underneath the skin and the area to be reduced. Some patients experience minor bruising or temporary redness, but these temporary effects do not interfere with an immediate resumption of normal activities.

The results, however, are not immediate. Patients may start to see changes within three weeks after treatment, and will experience the most dramatic results between two to four months. The cellular level changes caused by freezing trigger the body to use natural processes to metabolize the fat cells and these processes take time.

As for the specifics of CoolSculpting,TM Dr. Avram said the precise temperature used in the treatment is a trade secret. But he said that those hoping to get rid of a few bumps and bulges should not try to take matters into their own hands.

"I wouldn't recommend that people jump out into a snow bank and expect to lose fat," he said. "If that worked, Alaska would be the thinnest state in the country. This is not something you want to try at home."

Dr. Avram, however, used the technique on his own love handles and is very happy with the results.

Mathew M. Avram, MD
Director, Dermatology Laser &
Cosmetic Center
Massachusetts General Hospital

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