Probiotic Rotation Protocol  
*Be Friendly To Your Friendly Bacteria*

Probiotics are essential not only for digestive and bowel health, but also are the root of our immune system, comprising a whopping 70% of one’s immunity.  Beyond health maintenance, they are all the more important when water and food sources change, especially when travelling to faraway places.   Our gut and immunity need to adapt to new environments or even a change of food and drink from the restaurant down the road and, be supplied with the proper nutrient building blocks to accomplish this. By the way, many people get probiotics confused with digestive enzymes and vice versa. Basically, enzymes function only in the upper gastrointestinal tract (stomach and small intestine), not the lower bowel/intestine. They perform the critical function of breaking food down allowing for proper nutrient absorption and assimilation. Probiotics function only in the lower bowel and maintain the equally critical function of maintaining microflora balance, or the health of our “gut ecology.”

Any given probiotic supplement has a different mix of different strains of healthy bacteria (probiotics), each of them are equally important and, all of them must occur in a delicate, proportional balancing act. Regardless of claims, no one brand has the entire mix exactly as it occurs intestinally. Thus, I generally suggest rotating a variety of different brands, so as to better cover the entire spectrum, or come as close as possible.  No matter how good a given product is, no single product have *all* of them, hence I find rotation the best way to cover more bases. More quantity, or potency, is a different thing than the number of strains and, is not necessarily better. Just as with the B vitamins, if a person takes a mega potency of just one B vitamin without the counter balance of the entire B complex, they can create an even bigger imbalance than not taking the supplement. Probiotics are even more sophisticated than B vitamins. If a person wants to get really precise and individualized about it or, if health problems persist despite using even the so-called “best” brand, specialized stool testing will reveal which particular strains are out of balance and from there a more targeted formula can be chosen.

Here is one example of what a rotation protocol might look like.  In general, I recommend taking some probiotic at least 10 days per month for preventive health maintenance.   They can be used daily if you wish and, should be if you have a health condition.  Next to a multiple vitamin and omega-3 oils, I consider this type of digestive support to be the third most important and broadly beneficial foundational supplement. Three different probiotic products should be used in successive rotation. *Example of a monthly rotation schedule:*  MONTH 1: Brand A for 10 days. MONTH 2: Brand B for 10 days, and MONTH 3: Brand C for 10 days (each 10 period need not be consecutive, they can be spread randomly throughout the month). The 20 day break each month, or “vitamin vacation,” also gives your gut a chance to reestablish its own natural bacterial balance, thereby having a true nutritional restorative effect, rather than a replacement drug-like effect. Because some folks are unable to restore or maintain their own proper balance, if you need or prefer daily use of probiotics for a therapeutically defined period (say, six months), I still suggest a progressive 10 day cycle, but back to back: Each month then, rotate the three different brands, each one for 10 days, so that within a given month you are using all three. Again, any random or systematic variation will do; whatever is easy for you to remember. It is important that each product contain as many *different* strains as you can find. If you have difficulty finding a wide mix with little overlap between products feel free to contact me for professional quality, clinical strength product. Again, a high number of different strains is more important than a high potency product. While neither of these approaches may cover all of your precise individual needs, it obviously will do a much better job than blindly taking the same single thing day in and day out, month after month.

It cannot be overemphasized that getting the full mix of all 20 or so strains in a given rotation cycle is more important than the potency.  I have on hand, or you can look for and compare, formulas with 4 – 20+ different strains and a 6 – 50 billion potency.  The lower end products are generally used for routine prevention / maintenance while the higher end, clinical-strength formulas to treat digestive disorders / bowel problems, immune deficiencies, etc.

Now for travelling, I would approach this much like treating a disease, or haven taken antibiotics – both can profoundly disrupt gut flora balance.  In addition to the routine low-dose use and 10 day per month rotation schedule, I would ***add*** a good upper end formula beginning a few days before a trip or a course of antibiotics and, continue throughout the trip and, for at least 7 – 10 days afterward.

If you’ve experienced no digestive / bowel upsets from your travels thus far, you’re fortunate or, just may be unaware of it and perhaps not connect it with an apparently unrelated health problem, such as arthritis.  I hear many, many stories of folks’ good health turning bad after returning from an out of country trip.  Granted, parasites also account for some of this and, not just the bacterial imbalance; many and probably most are actually hit with this double whammy and really struggle to recover if they don’t pinpoint the root cause(s). If you’re a globe-trotter, it’s wise to have a stool parasite test done routinely.  Even with no overt symptoms, those little buggers can still sap your nutrition, energy and, compromise immunity.  Since they are difficult to detect and often missed by conventional labs, the more frequent the testing the better. A good laboratory will usually do a triple check, asking for three different stool specimens, thereby increasing detection. Too many people are told their test result is negative when in fact the bugs were simply at a stage of their life cycle that is difficult to detect by a standard laboratory.

Remember, whether at home or abroad, be friendly to your friendly flora and, they will be friendly to the whole of you.

Riddle for my next article installment:   
What comes *before* a pro-biotic and, is just as, if not more, important?

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NOTE: the last article was on tasty and simple ways to eat and really enjoy more vegetables and, come closer the recently revised recommendation of 9 servings per day. If you haven’t seen I feel free to request a copy by email. Veggies are my number one recommendation for improving our nutritional status and overall health. Most are even food medicine.

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PRE-BIOTICS  
A Critical Precursor to a Better Balance of Probiotics

And now for something not so completely different (from the previous article on probiotics): PRE-biotics are foods and supplements containing a medium-length starch that selectively feed *all* of the various strains of healthy bowel flora in proper proportion, although at limited low levels. (“medium” essentially means somewhere in the middle of a short/simple starch like sugar and long/complex ones in grains and potatoes.) So they act as easily digestible “food” for the already existing healthy bacteria (even if such are at very low levels) whereas probiotics are bacteria. They also serve to feed *all* of the healthy bacteria allowing them not only to proliferate, but to do so in proper proportion to one another. A person thus ends up with far more and a greater balance of healthy strains far beyond those listed on a popular product label. They therefore make an excellent back drop to higher clinical-strength probiotics discussed previously. They are mild enough to be used daily and can be one of the three items in the previously discussed rotation schedule, or used separately. Pre-biotics also have additional health benefits and treatment applications, such as blood sugar problems, immune deficiencies, obesity and other conditions.

Prebiotics are available supplementally, sometimes called Inulin or FructoOligoSacchride (FOS). Some good food sources include: Jerusalem Artichoke, Globe Artichoke, onion, garlic, leek, cabbage, asparagus, root veggies (emphasize the colorful ones, minimize the white ones), beans, banana, apple, tomato, etc. A complete list will be posted on my website; in the meantime feel free to request a copy by email. At best however, food sources contain only up to 20% FOS (Jerusalem Artichoke being one of the highest), while supplements are nearly 100%. Prebiotic-rich foods are fine for routine, preventive health maintenance if you eat such foods on a regular, daily basis and/or are using a low end probiotic. However, if you have a specific health condition for which you are using high end or clinical strength probiotics, I suggest supplemental prebiotics be used as a back drop.

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The previous article on probiotics is posted on facebook, will soon be on my website, or may be obtained by email.

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