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 like the fertilizer of your gut: foods and supplements containing a medium-length starch that selectively feed *all* of the various strains of healthy bowel flora (“medium” essentially means somewhere in the middle of a short/simple starch like sugar and long/complex ones in grains and root veggies.) 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.

Recall that a broad spectrum of healthy bacteria is far more important than mega potency of only selected strains. With over 500 different types of microorganisms (probiotics) throughout the digestive tract, it is impossible to eat or supplement for all of them. Taken all together, they weigh about three and one-half pounds, more than our brain. Think about it, we'd have to swallow a probiotic pill the size of a soccer ball to get them all! Just as with vitamins and vitamin co-factors being continually discovered, there are likely as-yet undiscovered healthy bacteria. This is where pre-biotics really shine; they know where to go in your gut to feed even a fading whisper of the good guys. And they won’t make them grow so big and strong that they overshadow the rest of the gang.

Pre-biotics 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 even 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 mood disorders, blood sugar problems, immune deficiencies, obesity and other conditions. Beyond the primary benefit to digestion and immunity, up to 10 percent of our daily energy needs can be derived from the by-products of the good bacteria in our gut, which can ignited by pre-biotics.

Prebiotics are available supplementally, sometimes called Inulin or FructoOligoSacchride (FOS). Some good food sources include: Jerusalem Artichoke, Globe Artichoke, Chicory root, onion, garlic, leek, cabbage, asparagus, root veggies (emphasize the colorful ones, minimize the white ones), Dandelion greens, 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 and Chicory being among 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, or don’t regularly eat such foods, I suggest supplemental prebiotics be used as a back drop.

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

A separate upcoming post will discuss food sources vs supplement sources of pro- and pre-biotics and provide simple instructions on how to ferment your own vegetables for improved nutrition, digestibility, and pre-biotics.

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