

1 More Reason You Should Start Taking Probiotics

When we think of bacteria, we tend to think of disease-causing microbes that threaten our health, with antibacterial products all the rage and antibiotics among the most prescribed medicines doctors dole out. But in fact, many of the trillions of bacteria that live in our digestive tracts are “good bacteria”—essential to our health.

Some help us digest food, ward off infections, and can even help to lower blood pressure and reduce the risk for heart disease, diabetes, and obesity. Probiotics are a class of these beneficial bacteria—mostly commonly found in yogurt, aged cheeses, and fermented soy products. And, a new analysis of nine studies has found that people who eat such foods have lower blood pressure levels, and a lower risk of heart attack, than those who don't.

Robert Newman, a certified nutritionist and wellness expert from East Northport, N.Y., tells *Newsmax Health* the new study found most blood pressure reductions were modest. But the new research is only the latest in a series of studies that have found probiotics can be important to maintaining good health and fighting off disease.

“I think the study showed that it took at least two months on the probiotics [to have an effect],” says Dr. Newman, in an interview on *Newsmax TV's Meet the Doctors* program. “They feel it may have been by lowering the cholesterol, which it does have that affect—it lowers the bad cholesterol, the LDL, and raises the HDL [the good cholesterol]—so that might have an effect on the blood vessels.”

Trillions of bacteria live in each person's digestive tract. Scientists believe that some of these bacteria help digest

food and stave off harmful infections. For the latest study, researchers reviewed nine randomized trials involving nearly 550 people, who ate probiotic products containing live bacteria. The studies tested various probiotics in varying amounts, mostly strains of *Lactobacillus* consumed in dairy products.

Eight of the nine studies found reductions in blood pressure, according to a report on the review published in the journal *Hypertension*. Over all, compared with people who don't eat probiotics, the use of such products reduced systolic blood pressure (the top number) by an average of millimeters of mercury and diastolic pressure by .

"Yogurt, cheese, fermented soy products—all of these are helpful," said researcher Jing Sun, a senior lecturer at Griffith Health Institute and Griffith University School of Medicine in Gold Coast, Australia. She said the findings suggest probiotics should be a routine part of a healthy diet. "We have to go beyond just fruits and vegetables."

Other studies have suggested gut bacteria play a critical role in metabolism and immune systems functions. Some medical specialists even refer to the human digestive system as a kind of "second nervous system" that regulates metabolism and many other bodily functions.

"The gut is lined with about 70 to 80 percent of the immune system of the entire body, which is really mind-blowing when you think about it, that it has such a tremendous effect on your whole system," Dr. Newman explains. "So by keeping that proper balance of healthy bacteria to bad bacteria, you're enhancing your immune system for fighting any kind of disease, from cancer to respiratory disease."

He adds that probiotics interact with substances in the digestive tract that can cause health problems.

"[Probiotics have] effects on chemicals that are made in the

gut,” he notes. “[When] we look at cancers, there are carcinogenic DNA changes and many times these bacteria will help resolve that and get rid of those chemicals” that cause such changes.

Dr. Newman notes that Greek yogurt is a terrific source of probiotics, but also has other health benefits.

“The Greek yogurt definitely has a higher protein level [than other varieties] so it’s going to keep your blood sugar at a steadier level,” he explains.

He also notes, however, that yogurt, aged cheese, and fermented soy products aren’t the only sources of health-boosting good bacteria. Others include kimchi, a traditional fermented Korean side dish made of vegetables sold in health food stores. Sauerkraut is also packed with probiotics. In addition, probiotics are available in supplement form.

Dr. Newman recommends seeking out foods or refrigerated supplements containing live cultures of *lactobacillus* and *bifidobacterium*—the more the better.

“There certainly are really high quality supplements,” he notes. “What I always recommend to my patients is go into the health food store and get the powdered version of the probiotic, as many a strain as you can get, and it would be in a refrigerated section, so you find they are much more viable in terms of activity in the body.”

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