

Dear Maria

What are probiotics, why should I have some?

Probiotics is a general term given to a host of friendly bacteria which is normally found in our intestines. They are so called because they are essential to a healthy body. Pro meaning for and biotics meaning life. Probiotics such as the well recognised acidophilus species and bifidus species, to name only 2 of the many species, should be alive and well through provision of nutrients in our diet. Their presence in the gut improves digestion and gut health. When their numbers are depleted, e.g. after a course of anti-biotics, their levels can be restored by supplementing them either in capsule form or with naturally fermented foods such as sauerkraut, (naturally fermented cabbage), fermented with live cultures yoghurt and even naturally fermented pickles. These to be affective need to be consumed daily.

This sounds easy enough to do yet it is not, for when the good gut flora is killed off, the so called bad bacteria and fungi tend to rapidly spread in the food rich intestine and over populate. This in turn leads to gut related health issues with can be described as Irritable Bowel Syndrome.

I often compare the gut to a compost heap. If you are a gardener, then you will at once recognise the comparison. If the compost heap is well rotted and smells sweet, it is an invaluable source of nutrients in the garden; plants become strong and healthy. If there is no compost available, after all existing nutrients in the soil have become depleted, the plants do not thrive and the specimens are sickly. So it is with our gut. The restoration, maintenance and balance of gut flora is fundamental to our health. Don't confuse prebiotics with probiotics. Prebiotics are only food for the good gut flora.

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