



The Best of Dr. Chet – October 15, 2011

While Paula and I are on vacation, I'm sending you a few of my best columns from years past. Here's your message from January 13, 2007

Good Bugs

Acidophilus. Bifidus. Streptococci. The *Jeopardy* question would be “What are names of bacteria?” Most people think bacteria are bad and associated only with disease. The spinach scare with *E. coli* is an example; listeria is another that happened recently.

But that's not the whole story. There are beneficial bacteria that live in your digestive system—at least they're supposed to be living there. They help complete the breakdown of food and also benefit the immune system.

Probiotics have strange names, but they're necessary for your good health. Also known as the microbial flora, they begin to accumulate from birth—maybe even before, depending on the diet of the mother. All of us have different types of bacteria in our colons because we eat foods from different parts of the world, thanks to today's food-distribution system. Antibiotics can destroy some of the beneficial bacteria, which may be why you get a bellyache after starting antibiotics.

Clinical research continues to grow, but regular supplementation with probiotics seems to have many benefits:

- Better immune function
- Reduction of dermatitis and eczema in infants and adults
- Fewer symptoms of asthma and allergies
- Improved digestion for those with Crohn's disease or irritable bowel disease
- And more.

Other than antibiotics, why do we lack these good bugs? One reason is that our food is too clean. Not the fruits and vegetables—washing can't remove all bacteria—but we eat too many processed foods. When foods are highly processed, both good and bad bacteria are destroyed, which is good, but it's also bad. That's why it's essential to supplement with probiotics.

When choosing a probiotic, look for one with the most variety—at least four different types, and the more variety the better. Select a probiotic that contains a prebiotic, the special sugars from fruit that the bacteria use to grow; it's another reason you should eat plenty of fruits and vegetables.

Frequently probiotics are refrigerated, but they don't have to be. As long as you avoid high temperatures, such as storing the bottle in a sunny window or leaving it in a closed car on a hot day, most of the bacteria should be viable when consumed.

How often should you take the probiotics? Every day. They're safe for infants, children, Baby Boomers, the elderly, and women who are pregnant.

Remember, they're supposed to be there and if they're not, they need to be replaced on a regular basis. Make friends with some good bugs. Your gut will thank you for it and so will your whole body.

What are you prepared to do today?

Dr. Chet

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