

## Probiotics

Many of my patients present for care following an illness that required treatment with antibiotics. When a bacterial infection occurs, antibiotics should be utilized in order to prevent the spread of bacteria to other systems of the body. For instance, if strep throat is not properly treated, there is significant risk of the disease spreading through the cardiovascular system, and can even lead to heart or kidney disease. Once a bacterial infection is diagnosed, prompt treatment should be initiated, and complete compliance to the antibiotic medication is always recommended.

When taking antibiotics, a majority of them are termed “broad spectrum”, which means they are designed to kill many types of bacteria, instead of the one that is causing your illness. Although extremely effective, these antibiotics also diminish large amounts of beneficial bacteria in our bodies. Did you know that the bacteria in your digestive tract is extremely important and is responsible for the breakdown of many essential nutrients, vitamins, and minerals we need every day? When antibiotics are used, normal digestion is affected, and our bodies lose the ability to absorb essential nutrients we need. Without these nutrients, our risk of new illnesses increase, and our immune system suffers.

For this reason, probiotics are essential in order to replenish out bacteria found throughout our digestive system. It is important for my patients to understand that there are many kinds of probiotics, with specific features that should be considered when purchased.

Your Probiotic should be:

- 1) Broad Spectrum- Many probiotics are designed to grow one or two forms of bacteria, when ideally 6-8 or more would be of greater benefit.
- 2) Dairy Free Probiotics- A growing allergen for adults, dairy can be a major factor in gastro-intestinal distress, and is the second leading food allergen to gluten. Although probiotics can be found in many dairy products, I would recommend utilizing probiotic supplements that do not contain dairy in order to decrease complications that may occur while rebuilding beneficial bacteria within your digestive tract.
- 3) Taken as indicated- A recent study done in 2011 demonstrated that patients frequently do not take their medications as prescribed. Investigators feel that compliance is even lower in supplements. Medications and supplements are maximally effective when taken as prescribed, and not as needed!
- 4) Buy from a reputable source- Over the counter probiotics can certainly be effective, but typically many options are available and picking one that is optimal can be overwhelming. We recommend talking to your primary care physician or speaking with a representative of Connecticut Back and Wellness to help guide you to a probiotic that is right for your particular situation.
- 5) Change them frequently- The average human body has over 100 different bacteria found in the intestinal tract. However, 30 are known to be predominant and essential for optimal digestion. By cycling your probiotic between three or four different kinds of probiotics, you will be able to replenish a greater spectrum of essential, beneficial bacteria.