



Probiotics, Prebiotics and Antibiotics *Understanding the Science of the “-biotics”*

The suffix “biotic” literally means “life.” There are three important types of “-biotics”: probiotics, prebiotics and antibiotics. They all play a different role in the body, but serve different purposes within the gastrointestinal tract. Each “-biotic” is highlighted below to provide a better understanding of their effect on the digestive system.

PROBIOTICS = “For Life”

Probiotics are live cultures or “friendly” bacteria that, when consumed in sufficient quantities, can provide health benefits beyond basic nutrition. The benefits are due, in large part, to the effects of these so-called “friendly” bacteria on different intestinal functions. Under normal circumstances, the “friendly” bacteria far outnumber the bad, but factors such as stress, antibiotics, illness, aging, and diet can alter the types and number of bacteria. Research suggests that when the intestinal microflora is out of balance, with not enough “friendly” bacteria, it may affect overall health and the proper functioning of the body.

PREBIOTICS = “Before Life”

Prebiotic are not bacteria. It is a non-digestible food ingredient (carbohydrate) that stimulates the growth or activity of “friendly” bacteria. Soluble fibers, inulin and fructooligosaccharides are examples of prebiotics. The principal characteristic and effect of prebiotics in the diet is to promote the growth and proliferation of beneficial bacteria in the intestinal tract, and thus, potentially enhance the effect of probiotic bacteria.

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ANTIBIOTICS = “Against Life”

Antibiotics are chemical substances that destroy bacteria. In that respect, specific antibiotics are targeted at infection-causing bacteria. There are many different antibiotics and they work in different ways. However, in many cases, an unintended consequence of the use of antibiotics is that they often kill most of the bacteria in the intestinal microflora.

Although all related to “life,” it’s clear that the three above mentioned “-biotics” have unique roles. It’s important to distinguish their differences to understand their impact on the function of the digestive system.

To learn more about probiotics, visit www.ProbioticsCenter.com or contact Beth Heller at beth.heller@edelman.com or 212.704.8161.

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