

Is Your Yogurt Alive?

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Michael Schaaf

Sales & Juice Bar Trainer/Educator for Performance Food Centers

The subject of probiotics has been gaining popularity over the last few years because of their possible links between good bacteria and their health benefits. The Food and Agricultural Organization (FAO) define probiotics as live microorganisms, which when administered in adequate amounts confer a health benefit on the host¹. Common descriptions for probiotics include ‘friendly’, ‘beneficial’ or ‘healthy’ bacteria. There are always both, good and bad, bacteria present in the gastrointestinal tract (GI). These live bacteria are known as intestinal or “gut” flora. The composition of the gastrointestinal flora differs from person to person. GI flora profoundly influences nutritional, physiological and protective processes. The importance of “gut health” is becoming more prevalent because of the potential benefits that can be seen throughout the systems in the body. The GI microflora aids in digestion, synthesis of vitamins and nutrients, metabolizing medication, and the maintenance of the immune system².

When the GI tract is healthy, probiotics filter out and eliminate harmful bacteria, toxins, chemicals, and other waste products². In addition, in a healthy environment, probiotics will deliver nutrients from food and water into the cells that need them much more efficiently. In contrast, if bad bacteria outnumber the presence of good bacteria, symptoms such as diarrhea, urinary tract infections, muscle pain, and fatigue could emerge.² Immune function can also be compromised, resulting in allergic reactions, autoimmune disorders and infection. Thankfully, the immune system can be put back into balance fairly quickly, so there is hope!

In a recent publication from the Annual Review of Food Science and Technology, it was stated that the most common and popular food carrier of probiotics are dairy products; specifically yogurt. Some of the good bacteria found in yogurt are known to be resistant to bile and gastric acidity,



which means they are able to reach and survive throughout the digestive tract³. Yogurt consumers will also benefit from the 9 grams of animal protein (per 6 oz. serving), calcium, vitamin B-2, B-12, potassium, and magnesium² that are found in yogurt. An important distinction to note is that only yogurts with “live and active cultures” on the label contain probiotics.

Adding probiotics into one’s diet is essential to ensure vital nutrients are being absorbed throughout the GI tract and reaching their intended destination. When it comes to exercise, nutrition plays a pivotal role in providing the body with proper nourishment to not only fuel activities, but to recover upon completion of those activities as well. During the window of recovery (30 minutes after completion of a workout), one must replace the calories expended so that the body can begin the rebuilding process and keep the metabolism at a high level. Consuming high quality, nutrient-rich calories will ensure that the cells are receiving clean resources in the rebuilding process. If the body has been provided with good bacteria, it will keep nutrient uptake high and the presence of toxins and waste low. Without efficient nutrient uptake, the body will have difficulty absorbing vitamins and minerals from food that is ingested. Introducing probiotics (as a supplement or as found in yogurt and other natural foods) can improve the effectiveness of your exercise or workout routine, by helping your body utilize the protein, healthy fats, and carbohydrates that you eat. Basically, we’re correcting the old adage of, “You are what you eat” to “You are what you digest”. If you want better health and fitness, don’t you think it is about time you started improving your health from in the inside out?

References

¹ Joint FAO/WHO Expert Consultation (2001). *Health and Nutrition Properties of Probiotics in Food*. [ONLINE] Available at: <ftp://ftp.fao.org/docrep/fao/009/a0512e/a0512e00.pdf>. [Last Accessed 5/6/13].

² Magee, Elaine (2007). *The Benefits of Yogurt*. [ONLINE] Available at: <http://www.webmd.com/diet/features/benefits-of-yogurt>. [Last Accessed 5/6/13].

³ Sanders, Mary Ellen & Marco, Maria, (2010). *Food Formats for Effective Delivery of Probiotics*. *Annual Review of Food Science and Technology*. 1 (1), pp.65-85

Michael Schaaf is a Sales Associate and Juice Bar Trainer/Educator at Performance Food Centers. He has a Bachelor’s Degree in Kinesiology from Penn State University as well as a Bachelor’s Degree in Psychology from Argosy University. Michael has over 5 years of personal training experience working with injury rehabilitation, athletes, and the elderly. He is in the process of obtaining the International Fitness Professional Association’s Sports Nutrition Certification and the National Strength and Conditioning Association’s Certified Strength and Conditioning Specialist Certification. When not working at PFC, he participates in adult softball and baseball leagues. He believes you can work smarter and not harder in order to reach your fitness goals!