Probiotics:
Twenty-First Century Support for Healthy Digestive and Immune Systems

by Ronald L. Hoffman, MD, CNS

For well over two decades, I have recommended the use of probiotics to my patients and have witnessed significant improvements in overall health and well-being among those who regularly consume a high-quality probiotic product. And I’ve seen more than just the elimination of digestive discomfort in those patients taking probiotics. Probiotics are one of the unsung heroes supporting good health and a strong immune system. Since the majority of the immune system’s receptors are located in the intestine, it is plausible that a healthy intestine, properly populated with lactic acid bacteria, is an indicator of a strong immune system. However, not all probiotics work in the same way. Some probiotics clearly appear to work differently than others. Why? Let me explain.

First, let’s define “probiotics.” The Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations defines probiotics as “microorganisms administered in adequate amounts to confer a beneficial health effect on the host.” For the purposes of this article, probiotics are synonymous with lactic acid bacteria – the “good” bacteria. A healthy colon should contain a ratio of 85% good bacteria to not more than 15% bad bacteria.

The beneficial effects of probiotic use include support of a healthy colon; enhancement of the immune system; synthesis and enhanced bioavailability of nutrients; improvements in the consumption of lactose products; support of healthy bowel movements; and support of healthy cell activity. Our current knowledge of the benefits of probiotics encourages proactive behavior. I recommend that probiotics become a part of everyone’s regimen of daily supplements. When seeking good health and a strong immune system, the use of probiotics may be without equal.

Much has been said and written about the differences between probiotic products. It is argued that some probiotic products contain more colony forming units (CFUs) than others and, hence, are more efficacious. Others suggest it is the different strains of lactic acid bacteria in their products that make them superior. Still others believe that a probiotic product that also contains prebiotics provides advantages. To some extent, each of these arguments is valid.

A particular level of CFUs is required in any “good” probiotic, but care must be taken that the CFUs are not so high that
the body activates its immune response to fight the perceived invasion of the good bacteria. Since various strains of probiotics serve different purposes, several symbiotic strains (i.e., those having a mutually beneficial relationship) in the same product may be beneficial. Further, symbiotic products (i.e., those containing both a probiotic and prebiotic ingredient) appear to confer additional health benefits. I recommend that my patients take a single product that contains adequate levels of CFUs, multi-strains of lactic acid bacteria, and a prebiotic ingredient, among other things.

I believe, however, there is one powerful test that must be met for a probiotic product to be rated as an “excellent” product. The question I ask is this: when is a probiotic product more than just a product designed to flood the colon with friendly bacteria in the hope that some of the bacteria will pass through the stomach’s acidic barrier and find the way to the colon? My years of clinical observation support the conclusion that a probiotic must be more than just a high CFU lactic acid bacteria product. It must also be capable of helping the body maintain a healthy colon and produce its own strains of lactic acid bacteria. After all, isn’t using the body’s own capabilities to provide new strength and vigor one of the best routes to good health? What can be more natural than encouraging the body’s innate production of its own specially adapted, individualized strains of lactic acid bacteria?

Now, the good news! I use such a unique probiotic product personally and in my professional practice! The product is known as Dr. Ohhira’s Probiotics 12 PLUS. Initial reports from Japan confirm my belief that Dr. Ohhira’s probiotic supplement is capable of providing support for a healthy colon. Also, since the product is designed to encourage the body’s health-giving capabilities, it need not be consumed daily to help a person seeking the benefits of taking a high-quality probiotic product.

Scientists have known for decades that good bacteria adhere to the colon walls and take up space that otherwise might be inhabited by pathogenic invaders. This is one of the many mechanisms of probiotic action that has been well-established for many years, dating back to scientific research by Dr. Elie Metchnikoff, who received a Nobel Prize for his work on probiotics early in the twentieth century.

I believe the body to maintain a healthy colon and to produce its own strains of lactic acid bacteria is driven by the cohesion of lactic acid bacteria in the colon, which is enhanced by the health-giving activities derived from additional ingredients present in Dr. Ohhira’s product. This combination of ingredients includes naturally developed prebiotics, hydrogen peroxide, enzymes, organic acids, bacteriocins, vitamins, minerals, and amino acids. I believe that only when these ingredients are present and working properly is the body able to reestablish and maintain a healthy colon and produce its own lactic acid bacteria.

This “self-maintenance” process begs the question: Why does this process occur when taking certain probiotic products but not when taking others? Dr. Ohhira and his team of research scientists from Japan believe that the body’s restorative capabilities, as they relate to the colon, are enhanced by the good bacteria delivered to the colon in the medium (i.e., fermented paste isolate) in which they were developed. I agree that the best probiotic products are those whose ingredients include not only several symbiotic strains of lactic acid bacteria but also the micronutrient byproducts and other valuable ingredients naturally developed during a lengthy fermentation process. The capability of the body to help itself seems to stem from the use of products that have been fermented for years rather than for days, weeks, or months.

Let me now focus on some of the wellness benefits provided by Dr. Ohhira’s Probiotics 12 PLUS, which is manufactured in Japan and distributed in the United States by Essential Formulas. (If you want to study the product in greater depth, go to www.EssentialFormulas.com.) The product is named after Dr. Ohhira, an award-winning microbiologist who studied at Okayama University. In my opinion, his probiotic is the most unique probiotic in the world today. Dr. Ohhira has dedicated his life to the study of human
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bacteria and the improvement of human health through ensuring the presence of adequate colonies of friendly bacteria in the colon and elsewhere.

After more than 25 years of thorough research, Dr. Ohhira concluded that good health prevails when the gastrointestinal (GI) tract is properly colonized with bacteria. He also found that the consumption and short-term presence of good bacteria alone does not lead to good health. Rather, a long-term balance between good and bad bacteria is necessary. This beneficial balance, according to Dr. Ohhira, can only be realized by reconditioning the colonic pH. Simply introducing friendly bacteria in large numbers will not resolve the situation.

Dr. Ohhira’s probiotics are developed using 12 strains of lactic acid bacteria, including what may be the strongest strain of lactic acid bacteria known to bacteriologists. This product maintains an optimum pH in the colon so necessary to the maintenance of strong and healthy colon. As we know, a healthy colon enhances the body’s immune functions and is conducive to a healthy balance of friendly bacteria and other flora in the colon.

This non-dairy product is the only one I have found that also provides the vast array of ingredients necessary to aid the body’s efforts to support good health and a strong colon. It is important to maintain a healthy colon, so it will continue to produce its own unique strains of good bacteria — bacteria not only required to support a healthy colon and immune system but also to support healthy liver functions.

International travelers like the product because it does not require refrigeration due to its unique formulation process. The product is fermented for several years in a natural temperature environment. This means that as the environmental conditions change during spring, summer, fall and winter, the product alters itself; the weaker bacteria die, and the progeny of the stronger bacteria become even stronger. With each generation, the strong bacteria become more robust via natural selection.

After the all-natural, non-GMO ingredients are fermented for several years, the finished product is delivered to a leading encapsulating firm for final preparation. It is tested a final time to assure product purity and ingredient compliance with rigid product specifications. The product is encapsulated in an expensive, high-tech, enteric-coated capsule to ensure that the ingredients pass through the stomach, so they can colonize in the colon. Since the capsule material is composed entirely of vegetable ingredients, the entire product is designated as “vegan.”

Lastly, important enzymes are present in Dr. Ohhira’s probiotics to help with digestion and other health-supporting functions, and Dr. Ohhira’s probiotics are free of chemicals, preservatives, artificial additives, coloring agents, and animal by-products.