

Probiotics & Prebiotics.... what's the difference?

Two of the most interesting and effective types of nutritional supplements to hit the market in the last few years are probiotics and prebiotics. The two are related to one another, but they aren't the same.

Having an imbalance of probiotic (good) and pathogenic (bad) bacteria in the intestines can lead to various health conditions including sluggish bowels, bloating and constipation. Supplementing your diet with probiotics and prebiotics can help to maintain a healthy balance of good bacteria over bad, thereby supporting your digestive system.

All sorts of things, such as antibiotics, diet and a weakened immune system can affect your beneficial gut bacteria. We know that probiotics can help with digestion but new research suggests they could also have a range of other benefits, including boosting the immune system, preventing asthma, eczema and other common allergies. Early research is also suggesting probiotics can aid weight-loss.

Probiotics:

We each have about 1kg of live bugs living inside us, helping to maintain a healthy digestive system. Probiotics help with the digestive process and the absorption of nutrients and minerals. They also help to boost the immune system and to bring an overall balance to the digestive tract. For probiotics to be effective, you need a daily intake of 5g which is difficult to get from diet alone, most of us manage c.2g. You can find this kind of bacteria in certain foods, including sauerkraut and yogurt.

Prebiotics, on the other hand, are not bacteria. They are specific nutrients, usually non-absorbable carbohydrates that can be found naturally occurring in certain food like whole grains, bananas, asparagus, garlic, onions and legumes. They benefit us by stimulating the bacteria in the digestive tract, to either grow or become more active, thereby increasing digestive health.

In order for probiotics to flourish, they need a good supply of prebiotics which are basically food for the good bacteria, however there are lots of good studies to suggest probiotics work very well on their own, but both is a good belt and braces approach!

What to buy:

Probiotics:- Actimel, Yakult, Activia – most commonly used but also full of sugar - check labels.

Tablets or powder:- looks for strains of Lactobacilli, Acidophilus Bifidobacteria

Prebiotics: BIMUNO IMMUNAID pastilles.

You can find them at all good health food shops, chemists or on line at www.naturaldispensary.co.uk.