



Understanding the bacteria in your intestine

Over the past 10 years, friendly bacteria or probiotics have become an important concept in scientific circles. More and more researchers are starting to realise that these “good bacteria” have a major impact on our health.

Probiotics, or non-disease causing micro-organisms that can be ingested through food or supplements, have been shown to play a positive role in immune regulation, the absorption of nutrients, and the treatment of diarrhoea in both children and adults.

10 FAST FACTS

Here are some amazing facts:

1. Your intestinal tract has over 100,000 billion micro-organisms. This means that there is approximately 10 times the number of micro-organisms in your body than there are cells.
2. Your body plays host to more than 500 different species of bacteria. Mankind knows only 50 per cent of the strains. We do not yet know what some of them do.
3. The bacteria in your intestinal tract are able to cover a full tennis court, if spread out.
4. You have, at any one time, 1-2kg of bacteria in your intestine.
5. While most bacteria just live in our intestinal tract doing nothing, there are many that are essential to our well being.
6. The bacteria genome is vastly more complex than the human genome. “Genome” refers to the total genetic material of an organism.
7. All babies are born completely sterile. A baby’s intestinal micro biota is established during the first few months of life. After this period, the micro biota remains remarkably stable, unless upset by powerful antibiotics, poor eating habits or stress.

8. The combination of micro-organisms present in the intestine is unique to every individual, almost like fingerprints.
9. Lack of exposure to health-promoting micro-organisms is thought by many to be the reason why certain diseases like allergies and asthma are increasing in affluent societies.
10. In order to work efficiently, a true probiotics needs to be derived from human origin – usually cultivated from breast milk and a mother’s vaginal tract.

HELP THE GOOD BUGS

Here are some things that you can do help the “good bacteria” in your intestine live well and longer.

- Avoid antibiotics. They kill all germs - good, bad and neutral.
- Avoid water that contains chlorine and fluorine.
- Avoid meat that you know has been fed with antibiotics.
- Go for organic fruit and vegetable. Conventional fruit and vegetables have some harsh chemicals in them that can harm bacteria.
- Avoid highly refined foods - starch and sugars - that kill bacteria and encourage fermentation and growth of other bacteria.
- Take cultured food like yoghurt, kefit, tempeh and tapai.
- Take probiotic supplements. Make sure the probiotics are of local origin or locally derived strains. Recent research suggests that locally cultured friendly bacteria are better evolved to live longer and well in our intestines. Malaysian food is very different from that of American, European or Japanese food. Therefore, it makes sense for us to take local rather than imported probiotics. Remember the more “local” they are, the better and longer they will survive in the intestine.