



IS UNDERSTANDING ANTIBIOTICS, PROBIOTICS AND PREBIOTICS DRIVING YOU BUGGY?

BY DR. SUSAN MAPLES

Do you ever wonder why we live amidst an epidemic of noncommunicable (thought to be lifestyle-related) diseases? What are the root causes of metabolic, autoimmune, neurodegenerative and mental illnesses? It's easy to say it's what we eat (or don't eat), how we sleep (or don't sleep) or how we handle stress. There's now evidence that our own microbiome may not be as diverse and protective as it should be.

We have 100 trillion bacteria bugs (not to mention fungi and viruses) living on us and in us, 10 times more than the count of all our human cells. They live in four interconnected communities: the mouth, gut, vaginal tract (if you have one) and skin. Some bugs are protective, some harmful and some can go both ways.

Our bodies have an innate longing for microbial diversity — that which comes from regular contact with nature and eating relatively unprocessed foods, like our ancestors did. Oh, and avoiding things that destroy our biome — such as indiscriminate use of antibiotics, regular sugar consumption and chronic

stress. These three have become part of our “modern” societal norm and they'll take generations to undo.

If you're asked to take an ANTI-biotic, make sure it's for a specific bug/reason. It will wipe out a huge community of protective oral/gut biome along with the harmful. To help with gut DYS-biosis, many studies show health benefits from PRO-biotics. The best evidence seems to be in respiratory tract infections, allergic skin conditions and the prevention or treatment of antibiotic-associated gastrointestinal conditions such as diarrhea. Some probiotic brands/combinations are great, and some are no better than pixie dust, so choosing a quality probiotic will take guidance.

PRE-biotic is a buzzword that simply represents the dietary components that feed and promote growth of friendly bacteria — mostly vegetable-based fiber (our No. 1 dietary deficiency), which carries phytonutrients of the plants, and Omega 3 fats.

A note about children's gut health: If your kiddo was lucky enough to have had a vaginal birth, his/her

newborn “clean” gut got a good starting microbiome dose from your vaginal secretions and feces. If you are nursing, more from your skin biome too. Vaginal birthed babies have a full microbiota by about 18 months versus C-section babies, 5-7 years. In a healthy society 5-8 percent should be born of C-section, but unfortunately, ours is up to 32-35 percent.

Stay tuned! There is already evidence that administering probiotics to infants can have long-lasting effects on reducing allergic conditions, and decreasing risks of behavioral problems later.

My advice for increasing biodiversity of your microbiome? Eat real food (mostly plants), cut the sugar, play outside (eat dirt), avoid antibiotics without cause, take a good daily probiotic and get a dog! ■



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