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Children's Author: Eamonn Connolly, PhD. is Senior Vice President Research, BioGaia AB, Health Stockholm, Sweden Last Updated: Nov 29, 2012 - 7:11:02 AM

Probiotics in Pediatrics – A Healthy Dose of Good Bacteria

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By Eamonn Connolly, PhD. is Senior Vice President Research, BioGaia AB, Stockholm, Sweden
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(HealthNewsDigest.com) - Probiotics have become increasingly popular in recent years. A visit to any drug store will turn up a variety of probiotic offerings, including food products, drinks, and supplements.

What exactly are probiotics, and what do they do? According to the World Health Organization, a probiotic is a live microorganism which, when given in adequate amounts, confers a health benefit on the host. Many bacteria exist naturally in our environment, our food and in our bodies. But only a few have been shown to have probiotic,

health-promoting properties.

Probiotics work to destroy harmful bacteria in the digestive system, and they interact with the gut's immune system. They've been shown to help overall digestive function, including offering protection from some digestive infections and a reduction in the incidence of diarrhea, as well as a number of other digestive upsets.

One of the most exciting areas of research in probiotics has been in pediatrics. Evidence is showing that certain strains can accelerate recovery from acute diarrhea in infants and children, and also help reduce mortality from necrotizing enterocolitis in preterm infants when they're administered early in neonatal intensive care. Additionally, several studies are showing that a specific strain within the Lactobacillus family, L. reuteri Protectis, which was isolated from human breast milk and is exclusive to BioGaia products, can help to reduce symptoms of colic, which affects nearly 25% of all newborns, as well as functional abdominal pain (FAP), a condition that affects 10-20% of school-age kids.

Dr. Francesco Savino, MD, PhD, Department of Pediatrics, Regina Margherita Children's Hospital University of Turin, Italy, has been researching the effects of probiotics on colic. A study published in the journal Pediatrics in 2007 revealed that crying times for a group of colicky infants receiving L. reuteri Protectis were significantly reduced after just four weeks



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– 74%, compared to 26% in the group receiving simethicone, a common pharmaceutical used to treat gas.

A second colic study, published in the September, 2010 issue of Pediatrics, supports these initial findings. The new randomized, double-blind, placebo-controlled clinical trial administered by Dr. Savino resulted in similar dramatic findings among colicky infants. After just one week of supplementation, the reduction in crying time was 74% in the L. reuteri Protectis group, compared with 38% in the placebo group.

Why does L. reuteri Protectis work to help alleviate the symptoms of colic? L. reuteri is one of very few probiotic species whose natural habitat is the digestive tract, so it is particularly well adapted to thrive in the human body.

Additionally, there is evidence that L. reuteri Protectis induces significantly improved gastric emptying, leading to improved gut motility, function and food tolerance, which may explain the calming effect and reduced crying in infants. This strain has also been shown to lower levels of E. coli, a gut bacterium that has been shown to be associated with colic symptoms.

Another study, supporting the benefits of L. reuteri Protectis was published in the June 2010 issue of Journal of Paediatrics Child Health. The study involved children who suffered from Functional Abdominal Pain (FAP), a condition that often limits their ability to participate in regular daily activities because of chronic “tummy aches.” L. reuteri Protectis was clinically proven to have a significant impact on symptoms of FAP. In the study, 60 children, ages 6-16, who were classified as having FAP, received either L. reuteri Protectis or a placebo for four weeks. The children receiving the probiotic reported significantly lower pain intensity compared to those receiving the placebo.

While clinical research on probiotics continues, the data now available is promising and impressive. As probiotics become increasingly sought after as a way to alleviate certain pediatric gastrointestinal symptoms, here are a few things to keep in mind for those considering using them as part of a healthy lifestyle:

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There is essentially no risk associated with taking probiotics.

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Look for probiotic strains that have been proven to have effect in clinical studies for specific conditions.

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Check labels, as well as manufacturers’ websites, to see whether a product is a true probiotic by definition, and whether it contains named specific pure probiotics, which are more likely to have documented clinical research, rather than combinations of various strains.

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Check with your doctor or healthcare professional if you are considering taking probiotic supplements. Ask about how specific probiotics may benefit you or your family.

For further information: www.BioGaia.com

Eamonn Connolly, PhD. is Senior Vice President Research, BioGaia AB, Stockholm, Sweden, a company that has studied probiotics for more than 20 years. He has a background in clinical nutrition in the pharmaceutical industry with Pharmacia & Upjohn and Fresenius Kabi.

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