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Probiotics may protect infants from respiratory illness

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Daily supplements of a probiotic may reduce the incidence of respiratory illness for infants during their first eight months of life, says a new study.

Researchers from the University of Turku in Finland and probiotics player Chr. Hansen report that only 65 percent of infants who received daily doses of *Bifidobacterium animalis* subsp. *lactis* BB-12 experienced respiratory illnesses, compared with 94 percent of infants in the control group.

The study, published in the *British Journal of Nutrition*, is said to be the first to administer the probiotics using a pacifier – with the results supporting this as an interesting delivery system for infants.

While pacifiers have been used before to deliver medicines and functional foods, most slow-release pacifiers are designed with a thick, hard base, which deliver the active ingredients via an opening in the front plate, said the researchers.

“Our soft and broad new slow-release pacifier has been developed to contain a pouch in which the food supplement tablet can be inserted. The delivery method was tested before the study began: the BB-12–xylitol tablet and the control xylitol tablet dissolved from the pouch of the pacifier both slowly and completely during 7 to 15 minutes of sucking. Thus, the probiotic tablet could be delivered in a controlled way with the new pacifier,” they added.

The wider implications of gut health

The common cold is a viral infection primarily caused by rhinoviruses. It is the most common infectious disease in humans, and responsible for about 500 million illnesses in the US every year. According to a study published in the Archives of Internal Medicine, the common cold and related diseases costs the US about \$40 billion every year (2003, Vol. 163, pp. 487-494.).

Probiotics, alone or in combination with prebiotics, have been reported to potentially reduce the incidence of upper respiratory track infections. Indeed, we have [already reported on a study](#) from probiotic player Probi, which found that daily supplements with probiotic *Lactobacillus* strains may reduce the incidence of acquiring the common cold by 12 percent (*European Journal of Nutrition*, doi: 10.1007/s00394-010-0127-6).

According to the FAO/WHO, probiotics are defined as *“live microorganisms which when administered in adequate amounts confer a health benefit on the host”*.

Study details

Led by Turku University’s Teemu Taipale, the researchers recruited 109 one-month-old infants and randomly assigned them to receive either a daily probiotic BB-12-containing tablet or placebo twice a day up until the age of eight months.

While no significant differences were observed between the probiotic and placebo groups for gastrointestinal symptoms or use of antibiotics, a significant reduction in respiratory infections was observed in the probiotic-fed infants.

“Clinical trials with larger numbers of infants are required to corroborate the aforementioned findings,” concluded the researchers.

Source: *British Journal of Nutrition*

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“Bifidobacterium animalis subsp. lactis BB-12 in reducing the risk of infections in infancy”

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To read the full study, please click [here](#).

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