Probiotic Supplementation for Men & Women

Probiotics are an increasingly important aspect of supporting overall health and wellness as we learn more about the role of the microbiome's influence in health. While there are obvious physiological differences between men and women, there are many similarities and only a few key differences when it comes to considering probiotics.

Probiotic Considerations for Men and Women

The most obvious initial consideration for probiotics for men and women revolves around the digestive tract. While the structure and function of this organ system does not vary greatly between genders, an individual's response to common factors, such as dietary choices, can be incredibly diverse. Long term changes to digestive secretions, from medications, stress, or a variety of other environmental and outside factors, may eventually be a factor in the type and quantity of microbes residing in the digestive tract. When considering probiotics for men and women, the ability to survive gastric secretions is key to their beneficial action; lactic acid bacteria such as Lactobacillus and Bifidobacterium have an increased ability to survive this environment.[1] Since probiotics are complex microorganisms that are sensitive to heat, light, moisture, and acidic environments, proper processing and storage of the probiotics are key to ensure their survival.[2,3] Once the probiotics arrive at the appropriate part of the digestive tract, it is important to create an environment in which they can thrive.

Probiotics for Women

Probiotics for women are often recommended to promote an appropriate balance of microflora to prevent yeast overgrowth, but they can have other benefits.* Lactobacilli are found in the digestive and urogenital tracts; however, there are differences in the species based on location. The most dominant species found in the vagina are L. iners, L. crispatus, L. acidophilus, L. rhamnosus, and L. reuteri. Hormonal changes, such as menopause or the menstrual cycle, can affect these microbial populations.[4] Gut bacteria are suspected to play a role in the metabolism of estrogens.* In healthy, post-menopausal women, a small study demonstrated that increased microbial diversity was associated with a high ratio of metabolites to parent estrogen.[5] In another study with healthy participants, post-menopausal women and men had similar urinary estrogen metabolites which were directly associated with fecal microbiome richness and diversity.[6] Probiotics for women need to consider not just the presenting health concern but also the reproductive stage of life.*

Probiotics for Men

Probiotics for men may help support the urogenital system.* Specifically chosen formulas that include probiotics have demonstrated efficacy in supporting prostate health.[7] Supporting gut health with probiotics may support urogenital health through local and systemic immune system modulation.*[7]

The beneficial bacteria in the gut contribute to a wide range of bodily functions beyond digestive health. When recommending probiotics for men or for women, take into account which probiotic strain is appropriate for the desired outcome as well as optimizing digestive function.* As always, the most important consideration to assess probiotic supplement recommendations is a review of each individual's needs and health history.[8]

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