

Questions asked during the Healthy at Work Webinar Series:

Eating Well For A Healthy Gut – Happy Gut, Healthy You

Question:

If we have naturally occurring bacteria in our gut, are there any benefits or drawbacks to taking extra?

Answer:

There are no drawbacks to taking extra if you choose to eat foods with added probiotics. These foods, such as milk, yogurt and kefir, are safe to eat and can fit into your healthy meals and snacks. However, more research is needed to know the amount of probiotics that will give you health benefits. There may be a drawback if you choose to take a probiotic supplement because there is no guarantee that the product will be effective. As a generally healthy person, supplements are not necessary to be healthy. If you are planning to take a probiotic supplement, talk to your health care provider first (doctor, dietitian, nurse practitioner etc.). They can help you choose the product and dose that works for you. Be aware that the effects of probiotics will be different for every person. If you choose not to eat foods with probiotics, you can still have a healthy gut by eating healthy foods.

Question:

Are there pre/pro biotics in maple syrup?

Answer:

There are very small amounts of probiotics in maple syrup; however, maple syrup is very high in sugar. 1 tablespoon (15mL) of maple syrup has about 12g of sugar. Maple syrup is considered an added sugar, even though it is “natural”. If you enjoy maple syrup, only use a little and consider it a treat (something you enjoy eating once in a while). There are many healthy foods that have probiotics naturally in them or added to them (e.g. yogurt, milk, kefir, kimchi, sauerkraut, tempeh etc.) and prebiotics are found in many fruits and vegetables (e.g. apples, bananas, tomatoes, garlic, onions, etc.). You can easily fit these foods into your meals and snacks. Choose these foods more often if you choose to eat foods with probiotics and prebiotics.

Question:

There is concern regarding soy and that it mimics estrogen. Is there any truth to that? Are there guidelines as to how much soy is recommended?

Answer:

The concern is mostly related to soy supplements and people who have had breast cancer. For the general healthy person, soy foods are a healthy alternative. In fact, soy milk is the best alternative to cow’s milk as the protein in soy is similar to that found in animal proteins such as milk, meat and eggs. Soy is also a good source of nutrients including iron. Note that soy is a plant-based protein so we do not absorb the iron in soy products as well as in foods from

animal protein. As with other plant-based protein foods, is good to eat soy foods with foods that are high in vitamin C such as citrus fruits and bell peppers to help our bodies absorb the iron. So far, more research is needed on soy and estrogen. A recommended amount of soy is not yet known. You can have soy foods as part of your healthy meals and snacks, but taking soy supplements is not recommended. For breast cancer survivors, research shows it is safe to consume about 2 servings of soy foods a day. Talk to your health care provider if you have breast cancer and want to eat soy foods.

Question:

Are there any good, better, or best type of probiotic supplements? There are so many to choose from.

Answer:

Again, probiotic supplements are not necessary to be healthy as we already have lots of that good bacteria living inside of our guts. If you think you need a probiotic supplement, talk to your health care provider, such as a doctor or dietitian, first. You can contact a registered dietitian for free at EatRight Ontario: 1-877-510-510-2. They can help you to choose the product and dose that is right for you. Be aware that the product may not be effective since supplements can affect people differently. In Canada, probiotic supplements must meet certain criteria under the Natural Health Products Regulations in order to be sold. You will know if a probiotic supplement is regulated by finding the NPN (Natural Product Number) on the supplement label. If you are a generally healthy person, eating healthy foods, especially foods with fibre, will help you have a healthy gut – and foods taste much better than supplements!

Question:

What is a good breakfast meal option for probiotics?

Answer:

Some good breakfast meal options with probiotics could be:

- A yogurt parfait with sliced banana with nuts and/or seeds mixed into it.
- Or try a kefir parfait, using kefir as you would yogurt, top it with any fruit you like and nuts or seeds. You can also add this to cooked oats.
- Add probiotic milk or soy milk in your cooked oatmeal or porridge. Remember to have a piece of fruit as well! An apple or plum, make great choices as they have prebiotics.
- Make a fruit smoothie using probiotic milk, kefir, or yogurt.
- Add probiotic cheese to a vegetable omelette or frittata. Serve with a slice of whole grain toast and a glass of probiotic milk or soy milk.