

Could your child benefit from a probiotic?

What are probiotics?

Probiotics, such as acidophilus and Saccharomyces boulardii, are the good type of bacteria that help crowd out the harmful bacteria in order to support a healthy gut. This is important because more than 70% of the body's immune defences can be found in our digestive tract.

Probiotics are available in foods and supplements. Taking a live bacteria or yeast may seem counterproductive especially when you consider we take antibiotics to kill bacteria. However, the truth is that our digestive tract is home to more than 500 different beneficial bacterial species such as lactobacillus and bifidobacterium. They enhance the protective barrier of the digestive tract and assist in breaking down food. They help produce vitamin k which helps blood clot and has a role in healthy bones. These "good bacteria" help maintain a healthy immune system. The World Health Organisation describe probiotics as "live microorganisms which when administered in adequate amounts confer a health benefit on the host"

Why consider probiotics for children?

Research shows that having good probiotic levels helps to support digestion, immunity and energy for infants and children. This is particularly relevant for:

- Formula-fed babies
- Babies, infants and children during and after antibiotics
- Infants delivered by Caesarean section
- Premature infants
- Babies and children with digestive issues Eg. Colic, diarrhoea, constipation, lactose intolerance
- Babies and children with allergies and skin irritations such as eczema

Children given antibiotics may develop an imbalance of good and bad bacteria in the intestines, as antibiotics deplete normal levels of probiotic bacteria. An imbalance in the gut can manifest in the form of allergies and digestive problems in children, such as diarrhoea or constipation. Supplementing your child's natural healthy bacteria can contribute to their overall health and wellbeing. Probiotics and prebiotics can support a healthy immune system in infants & children. A healthy balance of probiotics in the intestines is thought to provide specific enzymes needed in the digestion of particular substances, production of B complex vitamins and vitamin K, and improves the absorption of minerals and nutrients such as calcium, essential for young children

Counteracting side-effects of antibiotics

Antibiotics kill "good" bacteria in the digestive tract along with "bad" bacteria. Probiotics to offset side effects from antibiotics like gas, cramping, or diarrhoea. According to Dr Dom Colbert, a co-founder of the Irish Society of Travel Medicine, diarrhoea occurs in about 20% of people on antibiotics. This is due to a 60 per cent reduction in beneficial bacteria by the antibiotic. To prevent side effects of antibiotics, the probiotic such as "Optibac for those on Antibiotics[®]" should be taken during a course of antibiotics.

Over use of antibiotics

I do not want to mention antibiotics without noting that antibiotics are grossly overused in Ireland in adults and children. This is a major cause of the rise of resistant strains of bacteria including superbugs such as MRSA and previously eradicated tuberculosis. Antibiotics should only be prescribed for confirmed and severe bacterial infections. They should not be prescribed for viral infections which are the cause of over 80% of colds and flus.

According to a 2009 report on health care associated infection by the Royal College of

Physicians of Ireland, Ireland is one of only three countries in Ireland where antibiotic use is increasing. This has resulted in Ireland having higher antibiotic resistance than other countries and is a ticking time bomb. Recently, the HSE has launched a public awareness campaign including radio ads warning people of the dangers of the unnecessary use of antibiotics.

What is a good probiotic to choose?

'OptiBac For your Child's Health[®]' is a natural supplement, and is completely free from sugars, artificial flavours and colourings which can be found in other children's probiotics. It is fully scientifically researched and clinically trialled.

Who's it for?

For babies, infants and children from 6 months to 12 years old; also for pregnant women and breastfeeding mothers looking to support their child's health

What does it contain?

Each sachet contains 3 billion live probiotic cultures and 0.75g of prebiotic fibres

How to take?

- Infants from 6 to 12 months: one sachet per day
- Children 12 months and above: one to two sachets per day, as desired
- Pregnant and breast feeding mothers: one sachet per day

The 10 sachet pack of 'OptiBac For your Child's Health[®]' costs €7.88 in Whelehans.

More information, including information on scientific studies showing the benefits of probiotics can be viewed at www.optibacprobiotics.co.uk.

Avoiding sugary probiotic drinks

Some of the yogurt style probiotic drinks in supermarkets are high in sugar so should be used in caution in children. They should only be taken in moderation and should not be taken every day. Many yogurt style probiotic drinks, including popular brands we all see advertised on the television, have higher sugar content than Coca Cola[®]. When in the supermarket, the safer natural source of probiotics for your kids is natural yogurt.

Health Services for children

Whelehans Pharmacy has many health services for children as well as adults. Whelehans has an in store chiropodist every Tuesday and Thursday. Common conditions he treats for children include warts and verrucas, athlete's foot and ingrown toenails. He also has a reduced rate of €25 for adults over 60 on Tuesdays. Our food intolerance test is aimed at children and adults. We can check for food intolerance to 59 of the most common causes of food intolerance. Food intolerance can be a cause or exacerbating factor for many childhood conditions including asthma, ADHD, bed wetting, eczema and sleep disturbance. Many children, especially those who are fussy eaters can be low in iron. Low iron can cause lethargy and can lead to poor concentration and school performance in children. We can check your child's iron levels with our 2 minute haemoglobin check. You don't need to book an appointment and it costs €5. Call us at 04493 34591 to book any of our clinics.

For comprehensive and free health advice and information call in to Whelehans, log on to www.whelehans.ie or dial 04493 34591. You can also e-mail queries to info@whelehans.ie.