

Family Medicine Clerkship Plain Language Summary Template

Title: Probiotics for improvement of symptoms in infectious diarrhea

Name: Josh Dorn

Plain Language Summary:

Every year there are many cases of diarrhea. Many are caused by microorganism. Examples are bacteria or viruses. This is called infectious diarrhea. Many of these cases are caused by viruses. In this case there is no specific treatment. The usual treatment is to make sure the person is drinking enough. Often there are not serious complications. One of the most serious complications is dehydration. This is true especially where there is not clean drinking water. Usually the diarrhea will go away on its own. Even if nothing is done. Sometimes this takes a week or two. These illnesses can be very uncomfortable though. It would be helpful if there were other helpful treatments. One treatment that can help is probiotics. Probiotics are bacteria that help your stomach and intestines stay healthy. When you take them they can help you feel better.

This research study is a systematic review. It analyzed over sixty studies. All of these looked at those with diarrhea. There were two groups in these studies. Both had infectious diarrhea. One was given probiotics. The other was not. Other than that they were treated the same. Different measurements were taken measuring symptoms. The changes in the two groups were compared. The first measurement was how long the diarrhea lasted for. Taking probiotics reduce the time that a person had diarrhea. Probiotics seemed to reduce it by about 1 day. Another measurement was if there was still diarrhea after four days of treatment. Fewer who took probiotics still had diarrhea after four days. The reduction was 59%. The last measurement was amount of diarrhea on day two. Day two was the second day after starting probiotics. People had about one less bowel movement on day two if they were on probiotics.

Probiotics are usually taken as a pill or mixed in a drink. They are full of organisms that help keep your stomach and intestines healthy. Many different types seem to help. It did not seem to matter which type was used. Some studies used multiple. Some used one. There are also almost no risks to taking probiotics. They are inexpensive to buy. This study is reliable because it used many other reliable studies. This study showed that probiotics are beneficial. They should be used in those with infectious diarrhea. There are minimal downsides to their use. There was one main problem with the study. The subjects included mostly children. Children get this type of illness more often. So they may be easier to study. The data that did include some adults though, and still showed they were beneficial to them. Hopefully with information from this study, they will be used more in the future.

Additional Resources:

Mayo clinic page on diarrhea.

<http://www.mayoclinic.com/health/diarrhea/DS00292>

National Institute of Health page on probiotics
<http://nccam.nih.gov/health/probiotics/>

Can purchase Probiotics online here.
<http://www.drugstore.com/vitamins/probiotics/qxg180678-0>

Key Words:

Probiotics
Acute Diarrhea
Infectious Diarrhea
Alternative Treatment
Improved Symptoms

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