



Yogurt: Good for your Gut!

Results of the first human clinical studies confirm that a new yogurt fights the bacteria that cause gastritis and stomach ulcers with what researchers describe as almost vaccine-like effects. The new yogurt is part of a growing “functional food” market that generates \$60 billion in sales annually. The yogurt is currently on store shelves in Japan, Korea, and Taiwan. The new study opens the door to possible arrival of the product in Canada and the US, say researchers.

Researchers have long known that yogurt, a fermented milk product containing live bacteria, is a healthy source of calcium, protein, and other nutrients. Some brands of yogurt are now made with “probiotics” – a type of bacteria intended to improve health. “With this new yogurt, people can now enjoy the taste of yogurt while preventing or eliminating the bacteria that cause stomach ulcers,” says the study coordinator.

A type of bacteria called *Helicobacter pylori* (*H. pylori*) causes many stomach ulcers. *H. pylori* ulcers can be effectively treated and eliminated with antibiotics and acid suppressants. However, that simple regimen is unavailable to millions of poverty-stricken people in developing countries who are infected with *H. pylori*. New research also links childhood *H. pylori* infection to malnutrition, growth impairment and other health problems. As a result, scientists have been seeking more economical and convenient ways of dealing with these bacteria.

In the new study, scientists found out that *H. pylori* seems to rely on a protein called urease to attach to and infect the stomach lining. Scientists turned to classic vaccine-making technology to stop the bacteria: they injected chickens with urease and

allowed the chickens’ immune systems to produce an antibody to the protein. The researchers then harvested the antibody, called IgY-urease, from the eggs. They theorized that yogurt containing the antibody may help prevent the bacteria from adhering to the stomach lining.

To test their theory, the scientists recruited 42 people who tested positive for *H. pylori*. The volunteers consumed two cups daily of either plain yogurt or yogurt containing the antibody for four weeks. Levels of urea, a byproduct of urease, decreased significantly in the antibody group when compared with the control group, indicating

reduced bacterial activity, the researchers say.

“The results indicate that the suppression of *H. pylori* infection in humans could be achieved by drinking yogurt fortified with urease antibody.” The antibody was eventually destroyed by stomach acid, but not before having its beneficial effect.

Although the yogurt appears less effective than antibiotics for reducing levels of *H. pylori*, it is a lot easier to take than medicine and can be eaten daily as part of regular dietary routine. Also, the antibody does not affect the yogurt’s overall taste and does not cause any apparent adverse side effects, note researchers. Still, anti-ulcer yogurt is not for everyone, scientists caution: people who are allergic to milk or eggs should probably avoid the product.

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