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Ease Your **WOES**

BY SCOTT BOULBOL

HOW PROBIOTICS CAN HELP EASE INTESTINAL, RESPIRATORY ILLS

"DON'T FORGET to eat your bacteria!" Not your typical motherly advice, but lately plenty of folks are hearing this from their doctors and dieticians, as specific types of healthy bacteria, called probiotics, show increasingly positive effects on overall gastrointestinal (GI) health and immune system strength.



And new studies suggest distance runners especially — with their increased susceptibility to GI problems and upper respiratory tract infections (URTI) — should take heed. One recent study, published in the *British Journal of Sports Medicine*, showed that distance runners can decrease by more than half the duration of post-race URTI, as well as the severity of the symptoms, with a steady regimen of probiotics, in this case *Lactobacillus acidophilus*, a strain commonly added to yogurt.

Casual runners and non-athletes can also benefit from a probiotic regimen, according to nutritionist **MONIQUE RYAN**, author of *Sports Nutrition for Endurance Athletes, 2nd Edition* (2007, VeloPress). Due to diet, stress, or perhaps genetic factors — as well as an ever-increasing dependence on antibiotics, which may help end your strep throat, but will also kill off some of these good bacteria — many people lack healthy levels of intestinal flora, she says.

SEAN CLANCY, a 32-year-old runner, triathlete and adventure racer from Aliso Viejo, Calif., didn't need scientific studies to convince him. In 2005, after 14 years of "suffering through annual intestinal illnesses, severe intestinal irritability, and influenza for too long," he began a probiotic regimen. The result? "Since that time I have not had a single

bout of the flu, and my stomach issues are just a memory," he says.

What exactly are probiotics? According to the World Health Organization, they're "live microorganisms which, when administered in adequate amounts, confer a health benefit on the host." In other words, they're "good" bacteria. And their purpose is to line the intestinal walls of a healthy GI tract in abundant numbers, aiding in digestion and reduc-

ing the likelihood of other "bad" bacteria seeping through the walls into the blood stream.

"The GI tract is really one of the biggest barriers we have for protecting our immune system," Ryan says. "Think of it as your biggest immune organ." And, of course, distance runners' immune systems are commonly diminished after long periods of intensive training or a difficult race or series of races.

Just ask marathoner **MARK MATYAZIC**, 43, a 2:49 marathoner from Irvine, Calif. He has been running for 25 years, and is also sold on the little buggers. Three years ago he started taking probiotics with great success, after battling GI issues and prolonged illness for years. "I get sick far less often," he says. "And I have minimal, or no, GI upset, with much better digestion."

And the benefits don't appear to stop in the gut. "Some probiotics also show heart health benefits by lowering the cholesterol level," says food scientist **DR. ARMIN SALMEN**, a chief researcher at

NextFoods. "There is also evidence that some probiotic strains improve iron absorption in the intestinal tract."

Probiotics are available in everyday yogurts, and have long been offered as supplements in powder and pill form. More recently, Naked Juice and newcomer GoodBelly have contributed probiotic-fortified juices to the market. Both brands are dairy- and soy-free, and GoodBelly's concoction includes a full-day's supply of vitamins.

But don't just begin pounding probiotic supplements because it's a growing trend. As always, consult your doctor or dietician first. Ryan says she recommends them only to people with known GI issues.

"If someone didn't have a GI problem, I wouldn't recommend them," she says. "I wouldn't recommend iron if someone wasn't iron-depleted, right?" She adds that in GI tracts with a healthy level of intestinal flora, an influx of extra probiotics could disrupt an already balanced system, causing other issues. She does make an occasional — and short-term — exception, however, for runners with persistent colds or infections, even without GI issues.

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* RECOVERY CUISINE

In the 24 hours after a marathon, consume a steady supply of carbohydrates and moderate portions of high-quality protein, says sports nutritionist Monique Ryan, author of *Sports Nutrition for Endurance Athletes, 2nd Edition* (2007, VeloPress).

➤ Drink fluids regularly so your urine returns to a pale yellow color after a few hours. Look for recovery drinks with 60-80g of carbohydrate per serving and, ideally, small amounts of protein, too.

➤ Consume plenty of colorful fruits and vegetables for phytonutrients and antioxidants.

➤ Eat lean-protein foods that are high in calcium, such as skim dairy sources.

➤ Consume foods with moderate amounts of sodium to aid the re-hydration process.