

## FOOD FOR THOUGHT

### **Probiotics: The Other Side of the Antibiotic Story**

While healthcare and agriculture may seem like they have little in common, one thing is sure to bring controversy in both industries—antibiotics. This topic has been pushed to the forefront in recent years for two main reasons, 1) The increase in antibiotic-resistant bacteria being seen, and 2) The increased awareness of where and how our food is being produced. In humans and animals alike, the use, overuse, and regulation of antibiotics is certainly an important conversation to have. Today, however, I want to offer you an alternative perspective on this topic by discussing the role and benefits of probiotics in your diet.

Before I get ahead of myself, let me establish a basic understanding of antibiotics. Antibiotics are a class of medications that treat bacterial infections by killing off targeted bacteria in the animal or human taking them. When an animal or human is put on an antibiotic that is not needed, is not well-matched to the bacteria causing the infection, or is not used for the correct duration, it allows bacteria to become resistant to the effect of that medication. Antibiotic-resistant bacteria pose a significant problem as they require us to use different and stronger antibiotics to get the same effect.

As a human, our intestines normally contain over 100 trillion bacteria (some good, some bad) that play a variety of roles including helping digestion, decreasing allergies, improving our immune system, and helping our body use certain vitamins. The balance of “good” and “bad” bacteria is important to our body’s overall function and can be negatively impacted by things like taking an antibiotic, stress, inflammation, and poor nutrition. That is where probiotics come in. Probiotics are foods or supplements that contain beneficial live bacteria that help replace those killed by antibiotics and restore the proper balance of bacteria in our gut.

Probiotics are available in supplement form, such as the common brands Culturelle or Florastor. Each brand contains a different mix and number of bacteria, so you may want to discuss with your doctor, dietitian, or pharmacist before choosing one. In addition, there are a variety of foods that naturally contain probiotics which I would encourage you to use in place of or along with a supplement. Foods or drinks prepared using fermentation are typically highest in probiotics. These foods include yogurt (not frozen yogurt), cottage cheese, buttermilk, Greek olives, ginger ale, pickled fruits/vegetables, soy sauce, and sauerkraut. Other probiotic-containing foods less commonly consumed in this area include kefir (“liquid yogurt”), miso (fermented soybean paste), tempeh (fermented soybean cake, similar to tofu), and kombucha (fermented tea).

The proper use of antibiotics in agriculture and healthcare, regardless of its potential drawbacks, will always be a necessary component to treating sick animals and humans. By including more probiotic-rich foods in your diet, you can optimize your health and minimize the negative side effects of these medications.

For more information about probiotics or FMH Nutrition Services visit [www.fairfieldmemorial.org/content/nutrition-services](http://www.fairfieldmemorial.org/content/nutrition-services) or call 618-847-8326.