Scientists compared youngsters from a rural African village with another group living in Italy and found a dramatic difference. The African children had less obesity-linked bacteria, and more fatty acids which protect against inflammation.

The diet of the African children was similar to that of people living in the modern Western world thousands of years ago. Of the Italian children, only those who were still breast-feeding harbored bacteria resembling the African children’s.

The trillions of microbes that inhabit your gut help you to digest food, protect against disease-causing bugs and limit inflammation.

The Telegraph reports:

"Pediatrician Dr Paolo Lionetti … and colleagues said children in industrialized countries who eat … 'Western' diets may reduce microbial richness — potentially contributing to a rise in allergic and inflammatory diseases in the last half-century."

Sources:

- The Telegraph August 2, 2010
- Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences August 2, 2010 [epub ahead of print]

Comments:

Obesity is not the only health risk your child faces if he eats a diet consisting mainly of processed foods and snacks. As illustrated by this study, a junk food diet – with is a largely denatured diet, devoid of "live" nutrients such as healthy bacteria – can also set the stage for asthma, eczema, and a variety of allergies, inflammatory conditions and autoimmune diseases.

Sadly, as the Western-style diet spreads across the globe, much of the natural microbial diversity that is so crucial to good health is actually starting to disappear! Here, the authors stress the importance of "preserving this treasure of microbial diversity from ancient rural communities worldwide."
Indeed, the importance of eating a gut-healthy diet cannot be underestimated. Your gut plays a major role in your physical and even mental health, and having a healthy gut entails maintaining a balance of "good" and "bad" bacteria – *something you simply will not accomplish by eating highly processed, "dead" foods.*

Until recently, most doctors dismissed the notion that your digestive system did much of anything outside of breaking down food, but in recent years scientists have revealed just how inaccurate this thinking was.

For example, an estimated 80 percent of your immune system is actually located in your gut, so supporting your digestive health is essential to also supporting your immune system, which is your number one defense system against ALL disease.

Therefore, it should come as no major surprise to find out that lack of beneficial bacteria in your intestines will also allow allergies, inflammation and autoimmune diseases to flourish where they might not otherwise.

Common signs and symptoms that you may need to address your intestinal balance include:

- Gas and bloating
- Constipation or diarrhea
- Nausea
- Headaches
- Fatigue
- Sugar cravings, and cravings for refined carb foods

Chances are, *if you or your entire family eats a lot of processed junk foods and fast foods,* this list may be a description of a more or less an everyday "normal" state for you

**So What Foods Should You Avoid Like the Plague?**

**Soda**

In my mind this is where most people will get the biggest payoff for the amount of effort involved. The average person consumes more than one gallon of soda per week. Reducing or eliminating soda from your diet is one of the easiest shifts to make.

Most diet sodas are worse than regular sodas. When people ask me what is safer to drink: diet or regular soda, I ask them what they would rather be hit in the head with -- a baseball bat or a sledgehammer? It's a tough call, but I think a case can be made for regular soda being the lesser of two evils...
That said, regular soda with its high sugar content promotes yeast overgrowth, which in turn promotes allergies. In fact, many people with yeast-related allergies and food sensitivities tend to have sugar cravings, which is doubly problematic since it actually feeds the yeast that is already overgrown in their systems.

While many of you are not likely consuming many sodas, it is vital to understand the importance of this simple change for your friends and family who are not as health savvy as you. Gentle persistent encouragement of this principle will have massively profound implications on their health.

Fortunately there are simple alternatives that are relatively easy to implement. The best is pure clean water. I just completed a four-hour video interview with a leading water industry water expert and hope to share that with you in the next few weeks for more details.

For those who are really struggling, you can purchase carbonated water and use flavored liquid stevias for a taste that is very similar to most sodas. You can also use Turbo Tapping, which is a highly effective, free EFT tapping technique.

**Doughnuts and Pastries**

Overall these foods are worse than soda as they not only contain sugar, typically in the form of high fructose corn syrup, but they also contain dangerous trans fats. The reason I did not list this one first is that they are not consumed by as many people on a regular basis.

**French Fries**

Oh, they taste so good, but are ever so bad for you as they are loaded with the worst types of fat on the planet -- typically highly refined and genetically modified omega 6 oils, such as corn, canola, and soybean oils.

These highly processed omega-6 oils are bad enough if you eat them in the form of unheated salad dressing, but when these oils are heated to a high temperature, they transform into a potent mixture that is sure to destroy your health.

Avoid these like the plague. Be particularly careful when ordering hamburgers and other similar foods in a restaurant as most will include fries by default, and once they are at your table they're hard to resist. So please be sure to order a healthier alternative.

**Nearly All Breakfast Cereals**

Breakfast is, without question, the single most challenging meal to eat outside of your home. Most of the typical breakfast offerings will drag your health down. The most commonly consumed breakfast are breakfast cereals, which are merely disguised forms of high fructose corn syrup loaded with genetically modified (GM) grains. But pancakes, French toast, waffles, scrambled eggs and rolls don't do much to improve your health either.
Many may wonder about the scrambled egg concern but the high heat oxidized cholesterol in the eggs and severely damages it. Far better to have the eggs MINIMALLY cooked or better yet raw eggs.

Processed Foods and Snacks

In addition to these specific examples, processed foods in general can contribute to allergies for a number of different reasons. Most processed foods contain a variety of food colorings, flavors, preservatives, and other additives can have a major impact. Junk foods also has a detrimental effect on your gut flora, which has major consequences for your overall health, weight control, and the development of allergies.

The Many Health Benefits of Maintaining Healthy Gut Flora

The ideal ratio between the bacteria in your body is 85 percent "good" and 15 percent "bad." That's right – you need FAR more beneficial bacteria (probiotics) than you might think in order to maintain the right balance.

The key here is to avoid as many processed foods as you can. This is a challenge because over 90% of the foods that Americans eat are processed and the number source of calories is high fructose corn syrup. So the general principle is to avoid processed foods, but some foods are more particularly pernicious than others so let me give you some examples.

This ratio is essential for:

- The proper development and function of your immune system
- Protection against over-growth of other microorganisms that could cause disease
- Digestion of food and absorption of nutrients
- Producing vitamins, absorbing minerals and eliminating toxins

As you can see, probiotics perform a wide variety of functions, which renders them useful and beneficial for a number of health concerns, including the prevention or control of:

- Food and skin allergies in children
- Vaginitis
- Premature labor in pregnant women
- Inflammatory bowel disease
• Recurrent ear and bladder infections
• Chronic diarrhea

One of the ways friendly bacteria help prevent allergies, infections and inflammatory conditions is by training your immune system to distinguish between pathogens and non-harmful antigens, and to respond appropriately.

When you're deficient in these healthy bacteria, your immune system is ill equipped to address the many pathogens and antigens entering your system on a daily basis, and health problems can easily ensue.

**Your Gut’s Microflora Also Impacts Your Weight**

The microflora in your digestive system is also emerging as a major player in weight management, and needless to say, junk food and weight gain typically go hand in hand.

Your gut flora is by no means the only underlying reason for this, but it does play an important part.

Multiple studies have shown that obese people have different intestinal bacteria than slim people, and it appears that the microbes in an overweight body are much more efficient at extracting calories from food. Researchers have also suggested that certain bacteria may cause low-grade inflammation in your body, further contributing to obesity and difficulty to lose weight.

One such study found that the bifidobacteria counts taken from infants at the age of 6 months and 12 months were twice as high in healthy weight children as in those who became overweight, while S. Aureus levels were lower.

Interestingly, this finding may explain why breast-fed babies are also at a lower risk of obesity, as bifidobacteria flourish in the guts of breast-fed babies.

The breast-fed Italian babies in the study above were also the only ones harboring bacteria resembling the African children's, which indicates your "diet may dominate other factors such as ethnicity, sanitation, geography or climate," the researchers said.

Two previous studies found that obese people had about 20 percent more of a family of bacteria known as firmicutes, and almost 90 percent less of a bacteria called bacteroidetes than lean people. (Firmicutes help your body to extract calories from complex sugars and deposit those calories in fat.)

This latest study confirms those results, as here too, the African children had significantly higher levels of Bacteroidetes and far lower levels of the firmicutes linked to obesity.

**How to Optimize the Bacteria in Your Gut**
Fortunately, influencing the ratio of bacteria growing in your body is relatively easy. One of the most important steps you can take is to stop consuming processed and sugary foods. This includes cutting down on grains, as most grains are quickly converted into sugar in your body.

Keep in mind, of course, that if you or your children need to lose some excess weight, balancing your gut bacteria is only one part of the equation. Regular exercise and addressing any emotional blocks are also very important.

When you eat a healthy diet low in sugars and processed foods, one of the major benefits is that it naturally causes the good bacteria in your gut to flourish.

Yet, even with an extremely low-sugar diet, there are other factors that influence your gut bacteria. Antibiotics, chlorinated water, antibacterial soap, agricultural chemicals, pollution -- all of these things help to kill off your good bacteria. This is why it's a wise choice to "reseed" your body with good bacteria from time to time by taking a high-quality probiotic supplement or eating fermented foods.

In the past, people used fermented foods like yogurt and sauerkraut to support their digestive health, as these foods are rich in naturally beneficial bacteria. This is still the best route to optimal digestive health.

Healthy choices include:

- Lassi (an Indian yoghurt drink, traditionally enjoyed before dinner)
- Fermented milk, such as kefir
- Various pickled fermentations of cabbage, turnips, eggplant, cucumbers, onions, squash and carrots
- Natto (fermented soy)

If you were to eat a diet rich in fermented foods that have NOT been pasteurized (as pasteurization kills the naturally occurring probiotics), then you would likely enjoy great digestive health without any additional supplementation.

However, if you simply do not like any of these types of fermented foods, your next best option is to use a high quality probiotic supplement.

I have used many different brands over the past 15 years and there are many good ones out there. I also spent a long time researching and developing my own, called Complete Probiotics, in which I incorporated everything I have learned about this important tool over the years.

Keep in mind, however, that processed foods in general will destroy healthy microflora and feed bad bacteria and yeast, so you can't use the drug approach to probiotics -- meaning, you can't maintain a diet high in processed foods while taking a probiotic supplement to counteract the ill effects.

You may be able to temporarily suppress some of the troublesome symptoms caused by that kind of diet, but it won't work in the long run.