Probiotics May Not Always Be the Hero When It Comes To Preventing Asthma and Eczema

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We have published a number of studies noting the protective effects of probiotics for a variety of illnesses. This week we share a study designed to determine if the cumulative incidence of eczema and asthma could be decreased with the use of probiotics in infants in their first 6 months of life. Cabana et al. (10.1542/peds.2016-3000) performed a randomized double-blind controlled trial of Lactobacillus rhamnosus GG (LGG) given to 92 infants as a daily dose with inulin to promote growth of these beneficial microorganisms while 92 control babies just got inulin. The outcomes measured were the incidence of asthma and eczema in both populations. The results do more than just skin the surface by tracking the incidence prospectively at multiple points in time up to 5 years of age. The bottom line is that probiotics were not found to be beneficial in reducing the incidence of asthma and eczema. Does this mean you should do a gut check and not consider probiotics for use in preventing illness in infants? Not at all. This study might not have worked because of use of the wrong probiotic or because inulin in both populations promoted beneficial growth in the microbiome of both those who received probiotics and those who did not. The study hypothesis may not have worked out simply because eczema and asthma are not as susceptible to microbial influence as other diseases might be. Have you found probiotics beneficial in your practice for your patients? If so, we’d be interested to hear which ones you use and for what purpose by responding to this blog, posting a comment with this article on our website, or sharing your thoughts on our Facebook or Twitter links.