

International Life Sciences Institute-India

Welcome Address At

“Symposium on Probiotics For Health: An Indian Perspective”

By D. H. Pai Panandiker, Chairman, ILSI-INDIA

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It is a pleasure for me to welcome you to this **Symposium on Probiotics for Health: An Indian Perspective**, organized by ILSI-India and cosponsored by ICMR, NIN, NDRI and NIFTEM, with corporate support from Nestle, Danisco and Kejriwal Enterprises.

ILSI is a non-profit worldwide foundation with special interest in nutrition, food safety, risk assessment, environment and toxicology. It has 15 regional branches, and has within its fold the ILSI Research Foundation and the Centre for Health Promotion. ILSI has consultative status with Food and Agricultural Organization and NGO status with World Health Organization.

ILSI-India, carries forward the global ILSI agenda in the Indian context to address national public health issues. Considering the prevailing major problem of malnutrition, ILSI-India has given focused attention to food fortification, dietary supplements, and to nutrition strategy for reducing disease incidence in the country. This Symposium will be another step in understanding the role of probiotics in promoting better health.

Probiotics is currently a hot topic which has aroused considerable interest, both among scientists as also a section of consumers, though the importance of some of the probiotic foods was recognized long time back. What is now explored is the science behind probiotics which would help extend their application to a number of health issues and develop a variety of dietary supplements and functional foods.

FAO has defined probiotics as **“live organisms which when administered in adequate amounts confer a health benefit on the host”**. The most common probiotic food is yogurt and the most common microbe used is the lactic acid bacteria. There are surely many more strains used in a variety of probiotic foods that are already in the market.

Essentially, probiotics improve intestinal microbial balance that helps digest food better, clean the intestinal tract, fight hostile bacteria and thereby strengthen the

immune system. However, to be effective, probiotics must be non-toxic, contain a large number of viable cells, be capable of surviving and metabolizing in the gut and have good sensory properties.

The gut flora is not the same in all communities and as such the probiotic strain that works well in one population may not work equally well in another population. In this symposium we have therefore underlined the need to look at probiotics from Indian perspective. A lot more research is required to be undertaken, in India, to develop the right strain for the right product for the Indian consumer.

Some of the probiotic foods have been consumed for a long time without any adverse health consequences. Even so, it is necessary that the safety aspects are studied scientifically. The use of probiotics which today is confined mainly to yogurt and dahi, has to be extended to new products like fruit juices, processed vegetables, breakfast cereals, etc. With extensive their applications, it would be possible to make probiotics an effective food option for medicines for a number of diseases.

There is not however enough awareness and credibility among a majority of consumers about the benefits of probiotic foods. Hence, social marketing of these foods as a tool for sound health acquires importance.

This symposium will discuss the relevant scientific issues in the first two sessions and product development and consumer response in the third. We will conclude with a Panel Discussion which will identify the knowledge gaps that need to be looked into.

I am sure this symposium will generate valuable inputs for industry to develop new probiotic products, for academic institutions to research on beneficial health effects in Indian population and for Government to modulate policies to encourage appropriate use of probiotics as a health enhancer.