

# Could probiotics help HIV patients?

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Antiretroviral (ARV) drugs are the first line therapy for patients with HIV; however, ARV-treated, HIV-infected individuals still have a higher mortality rate than uninfected individuals. During the course of infection, HIV patients develop inflammation that damages the walls of the intestines, known as the gut mucosa, allowing intestinal microbes to escape and enter the blood stream to cause a life-threatening systemic infection. The health of the gut mucosa is significantly influenced by the complement of bacteria in the gut and there is mounting evidence that probiotic supplements benefit patients intestinal disorders, such as irritable bowel syndrome, *C. difficile* infection, and inflammatory bowel disease.

In this issue of the [Journal of Clinical Investigation](#), researchers led by Jason Brechley at the National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Disease, demonstrated that probiotic supplementation may also be beneficial for ARV-treated HIV patients. Brechley and colleagues treated SIV-infected macaques (a model of human HIV-infection) with either ARV alone or ARV in combination with a mixture of probiotics. Macaques treated with probiotics had enhanced gastrointestinal immune function and decreased inflammation compared to macaques treated with ARV alone.

In a companion article, Judith Aberg and colleagues at New York University School of Medicine discuss how these findings could benefit HIV patients.

**More information:** Probiotic/prebiotic supplementation of antiretrovirals improves gastrointestinal immunity in SIV-infected macaques, *Journal of Clinical Investigation*, 2013.

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