News Roundup

Lactobacillus and thrush prevention

A randomised controlled trial has dashed the hope that eating, or putting preparations of lactobacilli into the vagina, prevents thrush. The aim of the study published in the British Medical Journal was to test whether oral or vaginal lactobacillus could prevent post-antibiotic vulvovaginitis. The study recruited women aged 18–50 years with non-gonococcal cervicitis who started short-term treatment with oral antibiotics within 48 h of enrollment. Fifty general practices and 16 pharmacies collaborated. Women were excluded if they had vaginal symptoms, had used vaginal antifungal agents within the past month or other antibiotics within the past month, were pregnant or breastfeeding, or had had a vaginal infection within the past month or other antibiotics within 48 h of enrollment. Fifty general practices and 16 pharmacies collaborated. Women were excluded if they had vaginal symptoms, had used vaginal antifungal agents within the past month or other antibiotics within the past month, were pregnant or breastfeeding, or had had a vaginal infection within the past month or other antibiotics within 48 h of enrollment.

The trial used a 2 x 2 factorial design to test:
(a) an oral powder, Lactobacillus rhamnosus and Bifidobacterium longum against placebo (maltodextrin powder) and
(b) a vaginal pessary, Femilac® (containing Lactobacillus rhamnosus, L. delbrueckii, L. acidophilus and Streptococcus thermophilus) against placebo (maltodextrin).

Active treatments and placebos were identical in appearance. The trial used self-collection of vaginal specimens by patients (which is a convenient and validated method for the diagnosis of vaginal thrush) at 14 days. The analysis was on the basis of intention to treat. The results showed no protection for either the vaginal or oral administration of lactobacillus.

The authors point out that it seems unlikely that oral administration of lactobacillus could be helpful in the short term. The lactobacillus would have to survive gastric acid and competition from other gut bacteria and, in this case, the antibiotic taken as well. Also, lactobacilli exhibit host specificity and colonisation potential, so that not all lactobacilli can colonise the gut or the vagina. Lactobacillus pessaries are also affected by antibiotics.

So the advice is to be that patients susceptible to thrush after taking antibiotics should use conventional antifungal medication, not yogurt or other probiotics containing lactobacilli.

References

Sexual health recommendations

In its first annual report, the Independent Advisory Group for Sexual Health and HIV made 29 recommendations to Government, covering the broad areas of prioritising sexual health within public health, improving prevention and education, doing more research and delivering better co-ordinated and faster services.

The report gives an overview of the present state of sexual health in the UK. Diagnosis of sexually transmitted infections (including HIV), the highest teenage pregnancy rate in Western Europe, with particular concern about the high rates in London. There are significant variations in abortion services both in terms of waiting times and National Health Service funding.

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References

The advisors outlined what the Government could do to tackle rapidly emerging problems, but also set out what part general practices, primary care trusts, local authorities and individuals could play. They call on the Government to provide sufficient resources to increase the availability of services in genitourinary medicine clinics, community clinics and general practices.

Look at the full report to gather ammunition to fight for better provision in your area.

References