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EpiCor and its Immune Effects on Gut Health

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A summary of a study published in the *Journal of Agricultural and Food Chemistry*¹



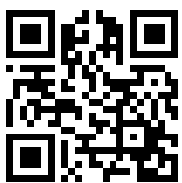
Summary: The gut is extremely important for proper immune health. Gut-Associated Lymphoid Tissue (GALT) comprises a large part of the immune system. An *in vitro* study, using a multistage simulator of the human digestive system, was conducted by ProDigest BVBA in Ghent Belgium to understand EpiCor's affect on the immune and digestive systems¹. Through this study EpiCor appears to support gut health through a variety of mechanisms:

- EpiCor acts as a prebiotic, which helps explain part of its mode of action as an immune system strengthener.
- The model used an established human gut flora inoculum and showed that EpiCor significantly increased the levels of butyrate, a short chain fatty acid (SCFA) that has been shown to be beneficial for gut immune health².
- EpiCor significantly increased the levels of beneficial bacteria (bifidobacteria and lactobacilli) over the control.
- Levels of secretory IgA have been shown to significantly increase with EpiCor vs. placebo in human clinical trials^{3,4}. This important immunoglobulin present in mucosal membranes is vital in our body's first line of defense against pathogens.
- EpiCor contains mannan-oligosaccharides (MOS) and β -glucans. Research has repeatedly demonstrated the beneficial effects of these oligosaccharides for gut immune health⁵.
- Results show that the immune and prebiotic effects of EpiCor are complementary and help to improve gut health.



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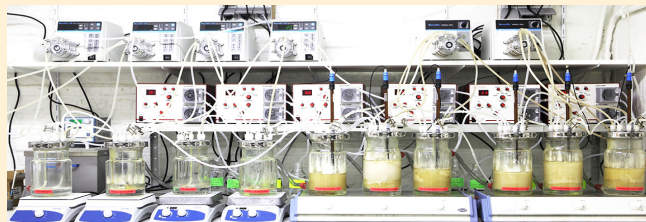
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EpiCor has been shown in multiple published studies to support both the innate and adaptive parts of the immune system^{3,4,6,7,8}. However, due to the complex interactions between the immune system and the digestive system (GALT), it seemed very likely that EpiCor would positively affect gut health. As a first step, EpiCor was studied in an *in vitro* prebiotic screening model developed by the University of Ghent and conducted by its related research company, ProDigest in Belgium.

The model studied was a multistage simulator of the human digestive system (Figure 1), using an established human gut flora inoculum. The system is designed to screen products for prebiotic and probiotic activity. To test for prebiotic effects, the relative amounts of SCFA levels and changes in populations of bifidobacteria and lactobacilli were measured. During this trial, cellulose was used as a negative control, and fructooligosaccharide (FOS) and inulin were used as positive controls.

Figure 1. Simulator of the Human Intestinal Microbial Ecosystem (SHIME)



The first vessel represents the stomach/duodenum, the second the jejunum/ileum and the third through fifth the colon (ascending, transverse and descending respectively). Photo courtesy of ProDigest.

Definitions

Probiotic: Live microorganisms which when administered in adequate amounts confer a health benefit on the host⁹.

Prebiotic: A prebiotic is a selectively fermented ingredient that results in specific changes in the composition and/or activity of the gastrointestinal microbiota, thus conferring benefit(s) upon host health¹⁰.

Synbiotic: The term synbiotic is used when a product contains both probiotics and prebiotics¹¹.

Effect of EpiCor on Short Chain Fatty Acids in the Model System

EpiCor caused a similar increase in total SCFA as inulin and FOS, but it shifted the pattern of SCFA to produce more butyrate (significant in the comparison of EpiCor to FOS, $p < 0.05$), as shown in the table below. This is very interesting; since butyrate is thought to positively interact with the immune system in a variety of ways (see discussion section below for more information on the benefits of butyrate).

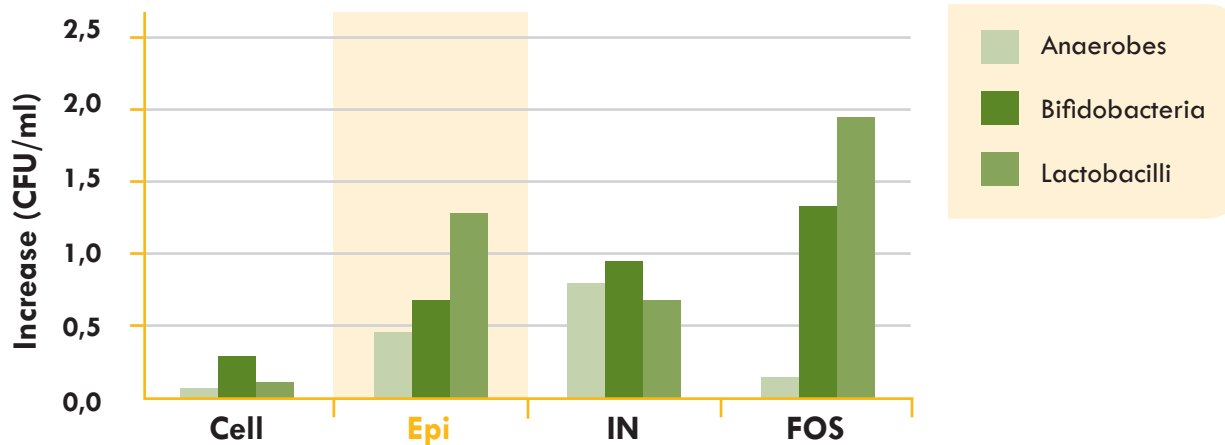
Table 1. The effect of EpiCor on SCFA

	EpiCor	Inulin	FOS
Acetate (%)	48	57	64
Propionate (%)	30	30	26
Butyrate (%)	21	14	9

Effect of EpiCor on Bacterial Populations in the Model System

The study results are reflected in the following graph (Figure 2), which shows the ability of EpiCor to increase the levels of these beneficial bacterial groups, bifidobacteria and lactobacilli, as compared to the cellulose control. These results suggest EpiCor acts as a prebiotic, with effects similar to inulin and FOS. These additional gut health benefits, combined with data from other studies performed^{6,7} with EpiCor, may further explain why EpiCor helps the body achieve immune balance.

Figure 2. The Effect of EpiCor on Bacterial Populations in the Model System



Discussion

SCFAs produced by bacteria during digestion have been recognized for many years as sources of energy for the host, which are mainly derived from fermentation reactions in the distal sections of the digestive system¹². Recently, there has been considerable interest in the effect of SCFAs on immune health, in particular butyrate. Apart from butyrate's association with energy, it is thought to interact directly with parts of the immune and digestive systems. Research has shown butyrate's beneficial effects on the structure of the gut wall and on its ability to alter cytokine profiles in such a way that the immune response is modulated. The effects include increasing levels of IL 10, an anti-inflammatory cytokine².

Lactobacilli and bifidobacteria are both considered beneficial bacteria in digestion, and indeed, many probiotics contain these species. These species have been shown to help "exclude" pathogenic bacteria, thus reducing the possibility of disease, especially traveler's diarrhea, and help balance the overall flora of the gut, leading to better and more regular digestion¹³. Having the appropriate levels of the right bacterial species in the gut is also important for overall immune health. The combination of the potential prebiotic effects shown here and the increase in secretory IgA shown in human clinical studies, strongly suggest that daily consumption of EpiCor may help balance the gut flora and modulate immune health in a beneficial manner^{3,4}. Furthermore, the presence of MOS in EpiCor, which is known to bind to and exclude pathogenic bacteria, could also aid in this endeavor. The polyphenols and β -glucans along with the other components present in EpiCor provide additional benefits for immune function.

EpiCor's prebiotic effects links to its positive immune effects in the digestive tract.

The study shows daily consumption of EpiCor may help balance the gut flora and modulate immune health in a beneficial manner.



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