Position statement on the prescribing of probiotics

In line with NHS England's guidance on conditions for which over-the-counter items should not be routinely prescribed,1 SW London CCGs* do not routinely support the prescribing of any probiotics for any indication, except VSL#3® for ileoanal pouchitis.

VSL#3® is a nutritional supplement for use under the supervision of a clinician for the maintenance of remission of ileoanal pouchitis induced by antibacterials in adults as per the Advisory Committee on Border Line substances (ACBS).

Rationale

- VSL#3® is an additive powder containing eight strains of live, freeze-dried bacteria (contains traces of soya, gluten and lactose).2
- VSL#3® is the only probiotic with any evidence for treatment for the ACBS approved indication (see above).2
- The British Society of Gastroenterology guidelines for the management of inflammatory bowel disease in adults state that VSL#3® probiotic therapy may be used to treat and prevent pouchitis. Its efficacy is lost soon after stopping the treatment.3
- A Cochrane review investigated use of probiotics to treat active ulcerative colitis (UC). There is limited evidence that probiotics may reduce disease activity, but not enough to recommend them to treat active UC. Larger, well designed randomised controlled trials are needed to determine this.4
- There is no clear evidence to support any role of probiotics in the maintenance of Crohn's disease after surgically or medically-induced remission.3

References


*SWL CCGs (NHS Croydon CCG, NHS Kingston CCG, NHS Merton CCG, NHS Richmond CCG, NHS Sutton CCG and NHS Wandsworth CCG) position statement on probiotics
Guidance for clinicians

Recommendations:

- Ensure prescribing of all VSL#3® on FP10 prescription meet the ACBS criteria and treatment is reviewed regularly.

- A lack of evidence for using probiotics other than VSL#3® for indications other than ileoanal pouchitis means that only prescribing of VSL#3® for the ACBS approved indication can be supported.

- Discontinue prescribing of probiotics other than VSL#3® for those patients who do not meet ACBS criteria or those patients with pouchitis where it is ineffective.

- Probiotics are available for purchase by patients over-the-counter if required, but advise patients about the lack of evidence of clinical benefit.

Guidance for patients, carers and guardians

- A lack of evidence for using probiotics other than VSL#3® for conditions other than ileoanal pouchitis means that your doctor will review your treatment.

- If you wish to continue your probiotic, you can purchase probiotics over-the-counter i.e. without prescription, from a variety of pharmacies and health food shops.

The NHS belongs to YOU, use it responsibly