About Probiotics

The basic makeup of your intestinal bacteria was established very early in your life. You may not realize that bacteria are continually introduced into your body as a normal part of daily life. However, at times, the result is a cascading effect that ends in noticeable digestive upsets as your body attempts to return to its normally balanced state.1

What Are Probiotics?
The World Health Organization defines probiotics as “live microorganisms which when administered in adequate amounts confer a health benefit on the host.”2 Probiotics are beneficial bacteria that aid digestion, help strengthen the body’s natural defenses and support a more appropriate balance of healthy bacteria in the gastrointestinal tract.3 Not all probiotics are the same, and many products that tout probiotic benefits are not clinically proven to be effective. Hundreds of different bacterial strains live in our bodies, but the most common and widely used are the Lactobacillus and Bifidobacterium strains. Probiotics are available to consumers mainly in the form of dietary supplements and foods.

How Do Probiotics Work?
The body’s natural bacterial balance can be disrupted and depleted by several factors including travel, stress, infection and antibiotic use4, leaving the body vulnerable to uncomfortable digestive upsets such as constipation, diarrhea, urgency, gas, and bloating. Probiotics are often used to restore bacterial balance and avoid digestive issues; the composition of the bacteria in the gut is complex. Scientists continue to research these microorganisms to better understand their role. Clinical trials show that probiotics appear to aid in various aspects, including nutrient breakdown and absorption, and irritable bowel syndrome. Research continues to determine the benefits of probiotics for immunity and antibiotic-resistant bacteria elimination in the gut.5

While they can be taken in different forms, probiotic strains that survive bile and stomach acid can end up in your GI tract where they may colonize, helping to restore the balance of healthy bacteria. To maximize effectiveness and because it may take several days to several weeks to see the full benefits, probiotics should be taken daily.

How Do I Pick a Probiotic Strain?
Talk to your local pharmacist or physician to determine what may work best for your symptoms. Here are some additional tips:

• **More is not necessarily better.** The number of probiotic bacteria needed to be effective is strain- and product-form specific. Live cultures must reach the intestines to be effective. Research a product’s CFUs, or colony forming units, to measure the amount of viable bacteria.
• **Show me the clinical data:** It’s important to recognize the clinical data that supports these friendly bacteria. Make sure to pick a probiotic strain that has been well researched and proven effective in improving digestive health—a strain like Bifantis® (**Bifidobacterium infantis** 35624), which is the only probiotic cited in a recent *New England Journal of Medicine* article to help with bloating and IBS.6

• **Choose a trusted manufacturer:** Look for companies that have a history of good clinical support for their products. Manufacturers should provide consumers with readily accessible product information through websites or toll-free numbers.

• **LIVE cultures—best used by:** Since probiotics are living organisms, a “best used by” date and a batch code should be printed on an individual container and serves as a reference number for the plant to track production information. Many products have complicated dosing regimens or directions and list suggested storage conditions that vary based on probiotic form and stability. While some probiotic supplements and food products require refrigeration to maintain viability, there are supplement options that do not require refrigeration and are easily portable. Special packaging ensures strains are live and most effective when ingested.

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