

Which probiotic do I need?

Probiotics can do more than help an upset tummy. Here's a guide to the different 'good bacteria' and what they do.

By Jennifer Nelson, March 2013, mnn.com

Which probiotic do I need? Yogurt is just one source of probiotics, which can also be found in kimchi, kefir and sauerkraut. Most people have heard about probiotics, the good bugs that help our guts, even if they haven't taken them. But they may not know that these good bacteria help more than just the stomach. How do they work, what can they be used for and who should use them? "Probiotics are foods and supplements that contain microorganisms, which improve digestive and overall health," says Ivy Branin, ND, a naturopathic physician in New York City. The Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) defines probiotics as "live microorganisms, which, when administered in adequate amounts, confer a health benefit on the host."

Why would we want to consume live microorganisms? Branin explains that we need to maintain normal flora to prevent infections by pathogenic bacteria, to maintain the integrity of the lining of the digestive tract, and to digest food. Sometimes medications, diet, diseases, infections or the environment can upset the balance between the good and bad bacteria. Probiotics can help restore that harmony. There are more than 400 bacterial species within a normal gastrointestinal tract. Small amounts are found in your stomach and small intestines, while the majority reside in your colon. These intestinal microflora aid in digestion, integrate vitamins and nutrients, metabolize some medications, support the functioning of the gut, and enhance the immune system. When your immune system isn't functioning optimally, you're more likely to develop colds, flu, allergic reactions, and auto immune disorders like rheumatoid arthritis or Crohn's disease. And when those gut microflora are disrupted, you may be more susceptible to a variety of disorders.

"Probiotics are especially beneficial for people who have frequently taken antibiotics, because beneficial bacteria in addition to pathogenic bacteria are killed off during antibiotic use," says Branin. Using probiotics can help prevent infection, decrease the duration of diarrhea associated with a variety of causes, decrease symptoms of irritable bowel syndrome (IBS), inflammatory bowel disease (IBD) and even improve lactose intolerance. They also keep the gastrointestinal tract healthy and can help manage autoimmune disorders associated with gut abnormalities like fibromyalgia, chronic fatigue syndrome and eczema.

However, people with compromised immune systems and serious infections like pancreatitis should check with their doctor before beginning a probiotic, as there can be conditions that make their use inadvisable, Branin cautions. We can get probiotics in live culture dairy products such as yogurt, kefir and sour cream. In addition, fermented soy and vegetables such as sauerkraut, kimchi, tempeh and miso contain live cultures. You can drink fermented tea called kombucha. However, the most clinically significant organisms are *Lactobacillus acidophilus* and *casei*, *Saccharomyces boulardii* and *Bifidobacteria*. "Most commercial yogurts don't contain those," explains Branin.

Probiotic supplements vary in the types of bacteria and quantity. Different bacteria are more beneficial for certain conditions.

Lactobacillus acidophilus – These beneficial bacteria are good for treating and preventing ulcerative colitis, irritable bowel syndrome, canker sores, eczema, lactose intolerance and the prevention of respiratory infections.

Acidophilus is also good for people on antibiotics. Taking a supplement with at least 15-20 billion organisms of acidophilus a day can maintain normal flora to prevent antibiotic-induced diarrhea, yeast infections and urinary tract infections. These may be found in yogurt, kimchi, miso, sauerkraut and kefir in addition to supplements.

Bifidobacteria – Another strain that's helpful when treating ulcerative colitis and irritable bowel syndrome (IBS). This strain is also associated with reducing dental cavities and improving low LDL (good) cholesterol levels.

Saccharomyces boulardii – Good for patients with Crohn's disease, Clostridium difficile (commonly called C. diff.), a bacterium affecting adults in hospitals and long-term care facilities, and to reduce side effects of treatment for Helicobacter pylori, a stomach bacteria thought to be responsible for ulcers. It's also used for preventing antibiotic-induced diarrhea, and in treating acne. May be found in kefir and kombucha tea.

Streptococcus thermophilus - Effective in the prevention of lactose intolerance. May be found in kimchi, kefir and sauerkraut.

In addition, tempeh may contain two molds, Rhizopus oryzae or Rhizopus oligosporus, and miso contains a variety of probiotics including Enterococcus faecium, Enterococcus durans, Enterococcus faecalis, Pediococcus acidilactici, Pediococcus pentosaceus, Lactobacillus plantarum and Weissella confusa. Branin recommends Pharmax HLC High Potency and Intensive. She also likes Flora Udo's Choice probiotics. "Most people should be getting about 10 billion organisms a day of Lactobacillus acidophilus and Bifidobacteria," she says.

What are prebiotics and do we need them?

What do onions, bananas and Jerusalem artichokes have in common, besides being vegetables? (This is relevant, we promise.)

By Chanie Kirschner, February 2013, mnn.com

We can't begin our conversation about prebiotics until we talk about probiotics (much like the way we can't discuss the cultural effects of "Gossip Girl" without first discussing "Dawson's Creek"). There's been a lot of talk recently about probiotics. These are the "healthy bacteria" that are found in our gut that aid in our digestive processes. Probiotics can be found in a variety of foods, particularly yogurt (that's what the label means when it says the yogurt contains "live and active cultures"). Doctors will often recommend taking probiotic supplements when antibiotics are prescribed for an infection. Since the antibiotics are killing off all the bacteria in the body, good and bad, research suggests that taking probiotic supplements can help counteract the ill effects.

So what are prebiotics and why haven't you heard about them?

Prebiotics are the lesser-known sibling of probiotics. That is to say, prebiotics are the indigestible dietary fibers we get from food that probiotics use to flourish and grow. Whereas probiotics are living organisms, prebiotics are not. Prebiotics can help the bacteria that is naturally found in your intestines flourish. Some prebiotics you may have heard of include oligosaccharide and inulin, which is naturally found in the chicory root (which is naturally found at Whole Foods).

PROBIOTIC & PREBIOTIC FACTORS...from: mother nature network...mnn.com

So where can you get a healthy dose of prebiotics? A Jerusalem artichoke, for one. (Honestly, if I went to the supermarket, I'm not even sure I could point out a regular artichoke, let alone a Jerusalem artichoke, but it's in all the prebiotic literature). Some other foods that we eat a tad more regularly that contain prebiotics are onions, leeks, whole grains and bananas. These fibers are indigestible, meaning they make their way to our digestive tract intact, feeding probiotic bacteria and keeping our intestines healthy places, filled with good bacteria.

Over the years, there has been more encouraging evidence that probiotics and prebiotics can help maintain a healthy digestive balance. There have been studies that suggest that these supplements can reduce the severity of a cold or the flu and can lessen the likelihood of developing certain cancers. Some doctors (particularly naturopathic ones) may suggest taking probiotic and prebiotic supplements on a regular basis if you've had recurrent yeast infections or suffer from irritable bowel syndrome. Because probiotics feed off of prebiotics, the two supplements generally go hand in hand, though some probiotic supplements also contain prebiotics — thus they are called synbiotics, because these probiotics and prebiotics are essentially working together. Make sure to check the label before you choose (the choices are vast) and of course, check with your doctor before starting any supplemental regimen.

PS from FactorReady.com: If nothing else, Probiotics appear very beneficial to take after a round of antibiotics, to restore good gut flora. They apparently should be taken for a minimum of at least 2 weeks from what we've read. HealthNewsReviews.com says the following of the 2 popular strains: Lactobacillus species: You will find that there are more than fifty different strains of lactobacillus. You can find this bacterium in your digestive system, urinary system and genital system. Fermented foods and drinks such as yogurt and various dietary supplements also have lactobacillus in plenty. Lactobacillus is crucial in treating or preventing various diseases and conditions such as: yeast infections, bacterial vaginosis, urinary tract infections, irritable bowel syndrome, and diarrhea and lactose intolerance. The other popular strain is Bifidobacteria: There are at least thirty different species of Bifidobacteria. These are probiotics that are normally found in the colon of healthy individuals. They usually make their first appearance in newborns immediately after birth when they have been breastfed by their mothers. In fact, the presence of Bifidobacteria in the intestinal tract of a newborn baby is an indicator that the baby has a good and health intestinal tract. One caution we've read is that stomach acid can keep contents of many probiotics brands from reaching the colon where it is the most needed. Therefore, best to make sure any capsules utilized are specifically acid resistant. One brand we've ran across that advertises this is StopAgingNow.com with their PurBiotics offerings, one of which (the Ultra) offers both Pro and Prebiotic content. Folks cancer concerned may wish to particularly look into the EpiBiotics product from EpigeneticLabs.com, which is an organic fermented botanical blend. Also, it is good to know that the Bifidobacteria strains can reportedly enable attacks on cancer tumor cells per Ann Cameron, author of "Curing Cancer With Carrots" (see our article on same). She recommends the Renew Life Ultimate Flora Adult 50+ Go Pack, which offers 30 billion count with 6 Bifidoacteria strains involved. Their time release formula aids in the delivery of this good bacteria according to RenewLife.com. Stay Well, Stay Prepared and Stay Prayed Up!

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