

Probiotics and Gut Health

August 1, 2023

Probiotics introduction.

Probiotics are made of good live bacteria and/or yeasts that naturally live in your body. You constantly have both good and bad bacteria in your body. When you get an infection, there's more bad bacteria, knocking your system out of balance. Good bacteria helps eliminate extra bad bacteria, returning the balance. Probiotic-supplements are a way to add good bacteria to your body.

What are probiotics?

Probiotics are live microorganisms that are intended to have health benefits when consumed or applied to the body. They can be found in yogurt and other fermented foods, dietary supplements, and beauty products. Although people often think of bacteria and other microorganisms as harmful "germs," many are actually helpful. Some bacteria help digest food, destroy disease-causing cells, or produce vitamins. Many of the microorganisms in probiotic products are the same as or similar to microorganisms that naturally live in our bodies.

How do probiotics work?

The main job of probiotics, or good bacteria, is to maintain a healthy balance in your body. Good bacteria keeps you healthy by supporting your immune function and controlling inflammation. Certain types of good bacteria can also:

- Help your body digest food.
- Keep bad bacteria from getting out of control and making you sick.
- Create vitamins.
- Help support the cells that line your gut to prevent bad bacteria that you may have consumed (through food or drinks) from entering your blood.
- Breakdown and absorb medications.
- This balancing act is naturally happening in your body all of the time. Eating a well-balanced diet

rich in fiber every day helps to keep the number of good bacteria at proper levels.

Probiotics from food and supplements.

You can increase the amount of good microbes in your body through foods, drinks, and supplements. You may already have certain foods in your daily diet that contain probiotics. Fermented foods in particular (sauerkraut and pickles, for example), are home to a host of good bacteria that benefit your body. There are also fermented drinks like kombucha (fermented tea) or kefir (fermented dairy drink) that introduce extra probiotics into your diet.

The brain-gut connection.

Research has shown that the brain and the gastrointestinal (GI) system are intimately connected. 80% of immune cells are located in the gut. Your gut is the epicenter of your physical and mental health.

Should I try them?

If you are interested in adding probiotics to your diet, it's worth a conversation with your healthcare provider. It is important to remember that not all probiotics behave the same way and have the same effects. Each has their own individual benefits. They generally don't cause harm. One easy way to start can be by simply introducing probiotic-rich foods into your diet, like yogurt.

Before you start any supplements, make sure you talk to your healthcare provider as probiotics are not always FDA regulated. Your provider may be able to point you in the right direction, helping you figure out the best cost effective probiotic to take, how much to take, and when to take it. A conversation is always worth the time when it concerns your health.



Grace Ostan, RN, FNP-C, DNP

"Hippocrates said: "Let food be thy medicine". Almost all of our health concerns can be traced back to our gut. Ensure a healthy gut and the rest will take care of itself. I read recently: "Take care of your body. It's the only place you have to live in", and I couldn't agree more."