



# Probiotics

Probiotics are live bacteria and yeasts that are good for your health, especially your digestive system. We usually think of bacteria as something that causes diseases. But your body is full of bacteria, both good and bad. Probiotics are often called "good" or "helpful" bacteria because they help keep your gut healthy. Probiotics are naturally found in your body. You can also find them in some foods and supplements.

It's only been since about the mid-1990s that people have wanted to know more about probiotics and their health benefits. Doctors often suggest them to help with digestive problems. And because of their newfound fame, you can find them in everything from yogurt to chocolate.

**How Do They Work?** Researchers are trying to figure out exactly how probiotics work. Here are some of the ways they may keep you healthy:

- When you lose "good" bacteria in your body (like after you take antibiotics, for example), probiotics can help replace them.
- They can help balance your "good" and "bad" bacteria to keep your body working like it should.

**What Do They Do?** Probiotics help move food through your gut. Researchers are still trying to figure out which are best for certain health problems. Some common conditions they treat are:

- Irritable bowel syndrome
- Inflammatory bowel disease (IBD)
- Infectious diarrhea (caused by viruses, bacteria, or parasites)
- Antibiotic-related diarrhea

There is also some research to show they help with problems in other parts of your body. For example, some people say they have helped with:

- Skin conditions, like eczema
- Urinary and vaginal health
- Preventing allergies and colds
- Oral health

**How to Use Them Safely:** The FDA regulates probiotics like foods, not like medications. Unlike drug companies, makers of probiotic supplements don't have to show their products are safe or that they work. Ask your doctor for more information about the correct product and dose for you.

In general, probiotic foods and supplements are thought to be safe for most people, though some people with immune system problems or other serious health conditions shouldn't take them. Talk to your doctor first to make sure they're OK for you. In some cases, mild side effects might include upset stomach, diarrhea, gas, and bloating for the first couple of days after you start them. They may also trigger allergic reactions. Stop taking them and talk to your doctor if you have problems.

Source: <http://www.webmd.com/digestive-disorders/features/what-are-probiotics>

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