

Perusing Probiotics

Conventional foods
with added probiotics



Lactobacillus bacteria



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What are probiotics? Are they “good” for us?

Probiotics are live microorganisms which when consumed in adequate amounts confer a health benefit on the host. It is important to our digestive system for our large intestines to maintain a healthy count of these “good” or “friendly” bacteria. When you consider *pro*-biotics, think the opposite of *anti*-biotics!

Probiotics are available in conventional foods and dietary supplements. Some foods naturally contain probiotics, others may be fortified such as yogurt, buttermilk, miso, tempeh and some juices and soy beverages. Check the label!

Most often, probiotics come from two groups of good bacteria, *Lactobacillus* or *Bifidobacterium*. Within each group, there are different species (for example, *Lactobacillus acidophilus* and *Bifidobacterium bifidus*). Different bacterial strains are effective for different health functions. A consensus of studies indicates that probiotics may contribute the following health benefits:

- **Improved nutrient absorption** of B vitamins, calcium, iron, zinc, copper, magnesium and phosphorus, and other nutrients.
- Decreased rate of acute diarrhea and rotavirus shedding.
- **Breastfed babies naturally benefit** from probiotics mainly, *Bifidobacterium*, which is found in breastmilk.

- **Active bacteria culture may improve lactose tolerance.** The bacterial strain commonly used in yogurt can produce lactase enzymes. So people with lactose intolerance and children with an intestinal infection may tolerate yogurt with an active culture.
- **By speeding-up intestinal transit time,** probiotics reduce constipation among the elderly.
- **Probiotics, especially acidophilus, promote the growth of healthy bacteria** in the colon and reduce the conversion of bile into carcinogens (cancer-causing substances).
- **Probiotics may enhance immunity** by regulating lymphocytes and antibodies.

Beware of probiotic **supplements** if not regulated by the FDA. Check with your physician before taking them. According to the National Center for Complementary and Alternative medicine (NCCAM) the science of probiotics is still emerging and regulation on the industry is not optimal yet. Food sources are your best bet!

*** For more details see reference: <http://nccam.nih.gov/health/probiotics/> ***

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