

# Probiotic Craze, What's Real?

By KJ Armann, M.D.

In certain situations, I have been recommending that my patients take probiotics for example when they are on antibiotics. Antibiotics can cause diarrhea, and the use of probiotics with the antibiotics may decrease the chances of getting diarrhea. Several days ago another physician said to me "which probiotics should be used?" He pointed out that there are over 700 types of bacteria in the gut, and about 400 are considered probiotics. I did my research and the following is what I discovered.

Probiotics are live bacteria and yeasts that are the good organisms in our gut. Our bodies don't need supplements of these organisms to be healthy, but it has been suggested that using supplemental probiotics will help us by:

1. Decreasing the number of bad bacteria in our gut that can cause infections or inflammation.
2. Restoring the "good" versus "bad" bacteria balance, which will maintain over all good health.

The Food and Drug Administration (FDA) considers probiotics a food or a supplement that is not regulated the same as medications and therefore is not approved by the FDA. This means that probiotics are not approved by the FDA for any health claims that we have been hearing about.

Probiotics are not without risks. They may cause an allergic reaction or can be harmful in certain chronic illnesses. Having said this, probiotics are considered to be generally safe for the majority of the population.



There have been extensive studies done on probiotics. There seems to be considerable promise to the claims that are being made. For example, there is strong evidence that probiotics are of benefit for acute diarrhea, diarrhea associated with antibiotic use, and may help with atopic eczema (common skin condition seen in infants). Probiotics are currently being studied for possible benefits in the treatment of irritable bowel syndrome (IBF), colon cancer, skin infections, vaginal infection, urinary tract infections, bladder cancer, and brain activity in humans. They may also prevent or reduce the severity of colds and flu.

If you are considering taking probiotics for overall improvement of health, the research currently shows that taking fortified or active culture yogurt will not be enough. Many of these live organisms will be killed in the stomach before they get to the large intestine which is where they are needed to do their job. Additional supplements in the form of capsules, powders, or pills will be necessary.

Do not take probiotics with hot foods or drinks as this will also kill many of the bacteria we are trying to replace. Look for probiotics that have CFUs (colony-forming units) in the range of 1 to 10 billion or more.

Probiotics are named in genus, species and strain so it's like giving each probiotic a first, middle and last name.

For example there are several forms of Lactobacillus: Lactobacillus acidophilus DDS-1 or Lactobacillus rhamnosus to name just two. Some experts suggest we take more than one brand or type of probiotic everyday or even twice a day. So look for products containing multiple genera of probiotics such as Lactobacillus, Bifidobacterium, or Saccharomyces genera.

Remember, always consult your doctor before taking any supplement, and tell your doctor what you are taking.



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