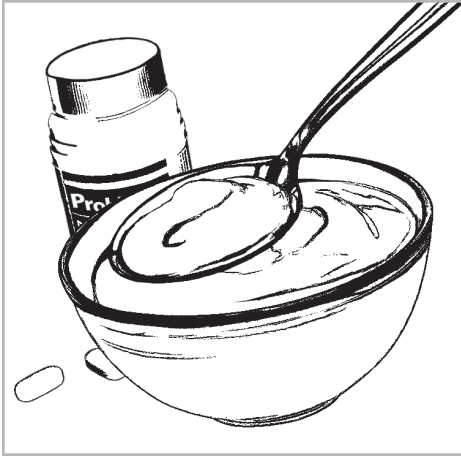


Probiotics



Probiotics are types of good bacteria that naturally live in your large intestine. They can also be found in certain foods and supplements. A good balance of these bacteria can help your body—especially your digestive system—work its best. There are different types of probiotics, and they work in different ways. Your doctor can recommend one that may be right for you.

Understanding Probiotics

Both good and bad types of bacteria live in your body, and most can be found in your intestines where they help break down food. You may think of bacteria as a bad thing, but probiotics are types of bacteria that are good for you and help you stay healthy. In general probiotics work to:

- **keep the right balance of good and bad bacteria in your digestive tract** to help strengthen your immune system
- **decrease the number of bad bacteria in your digestive tract** that could lead to infection or make you sick

There are many different types of probiotics and each one plays a specific role in your body and works a certain way.

Probiotics and Your Health

Doctors are still researching and testing probiotics to understand how they may play a role in preventing and treating certain health conditions. Probiotics aren't meant to take the place of medicine, but your doctor may recommend them along with your treatment. Studies show probiotics may be able to help:

- **constipation, diarrhea and irritable bowel syndrome** (IBS)
- **diarrhea as a side effect of taking antibiotics**
- **ulcerative colitis and Crohn's disease**
- **stomach inflammation and ulcers**
- **urinary tract infections and yeast infections** (in women)
- **gingivitis and periodontitis** (conditions in your gums)
- **eczema** (a skin condition)

Taking Probiotics

In addition to what your body makes, you can also get probiotics from certain foods and over-the-counter supplements:

Probiotics in foods—Foods like juices, soy drinks, milk, buttermilk, some soft cheeses, sauerkraut, some pickles and yogurt have different kinds of probiotics in them.

Probiotic supplements—These are usually made from a specific type of probiotic. They're available in capsules, tablets, powders and liquids.

Talk to your doctor before adding any probiotics to your diet—from food or supplements. There are different types of probiotics, and your doctor may be able to recommend the type that will best help you. Also keep in mind that probiotics could interfere with your medicines or cause allergic reactions.



Safety

Probiotics aren't medicines, so they aren't usually reviewed by the Food and Drug Administration (FDA)—the part of the government that makes sure treatments work and are safe before they're available to the public. This means that probiotics aren't studied or tested in the same ways that medicines are. It also means that probiotic products can advertise benefits, even if they aren't widely proven or accepted by the medical community.

Most doctors consider probiotics safe, since they're naturally already in your body. But all types of probiotics don't help all health conditions. Certain probiotics may be helpful for diarrhea, while others may be better at preventing stomach ulcers. It's best to let your doctor recommend a probiotic for you. Or if you find one that you think you'd like to try, show it to your doctor so he can review it with you.

To learn more, visit:

- **MedlinePlus**
www.medlineplus.gov
- **National Center for Complementary and Alternative Medicine**
www.nccam.nih.gov

Remember:

- Always talk to your doctor before you take probiotics.
- Probiotics shouldn't take the place of your prescribed medicine or treatment plan.
- Studies are still being done to learn about probiotics and their effects on certain health conditions.

This PatientPoint® handout may be reproduced for patient use and is provided courtesy of your doctor: