

PROBIOTICS- Protection from the Inside

Our bodies act as a host to many living bacteria which influence our health. Some of these are “bad” bacteria which are harmful to us directly causing infection or producing toxic substances which may cause inflammation leading to digestive problems or even cancer. **Probiotics** are “good” bacteria that reside in our body, positively benefiting our health. They have a key role in our digestive health, thus supporting our immune system to fight off infections. The two main families are; lactobacillus and bifidobacteria which keep in check the bad bacteria under control. When a person takes antibiotics both good and bad bacteria are killed leading to an imbalance in the colon’s microbial environment resulting in an overgrowth of the pathogenic bad bacteria consequently it may result in a variety of problems. If you have taken antibiotics and/or suffer from digestive symptoms such as heartburn, bad breath, colds and flu, diarrhoea, constipation, stomach cramps, flatulence, allergies, PMS, IBS, thrush, urinary infections or vaginal discharge you may want to consider reviewing your gut health.

The importance of probiotics were first highlighted in 1907 by Metchnikoff who linked exceptionally long lives in certain rural populations to drinking milk fermented by lactic-acid bacteria. He proposed that by drinking the milk there was an increase in the good bacteria population therefore decreasing the intestinal pH which in turn suppressed the growth of bad bacteria. Benefits of probiotic supplementation include improvement in digestion, production of vitamins, lowering of cholesterol, regulation of hormones, immune support, resistance to infections, colds and flu, eczema, relief of symptoms related to IBS, thrush, urinary tract infection and certain cancers. If you are considering taking probiotics for therapeutic reasons then you will require much higher amounts and you may want to consider consulting a health professional.

For general good health instead of taking supplements incorporating probiotics within your diet is the easiest and cheapest way to start. Natural food sources of probiotics include;

- Live cultured Yogurt (particularly those made from goat’s milk)
- Sauerkraut
- Miso soup (a fermented soybean paste)
- Soft cheese
- Kefir (a cross between yogurt and milk)
- Sourdough bread
- Milk with probiotics (e.g. buttermilk)
- Naturally fermented sour pickles (e.g. Kim chi)
- Tempeh
- Dark chocolate
- Microalgae
- Olives in brine



Apart from ingesting probiotics you can also help to grow them by feeding them with **Prebiotics**. These are non-digestible carbohydrates that support growth of the good bacteria so that they can multiply. Prebiotics can also be found as natural food sources such as;

- Whole grains
- Bananas
- Onions
- Garlic
- Honey
- Artichokes
- Asparagus
- Maple syrup

To get the best results consider combining probiotics with prebiotics together. This way you don't just increase the number of good bacteria but also give them the fuel that they need to multiply. This combined food is called **Symbiotic** which is also sold as a nutritional supplement.

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