
Guidelines on How to Choose a Probiotic

Probiotics are “good” microorganisms such as bacteria or yeast with proven health benefits when taken in the right amounts. They work to keep the colon healthy by balancing good and bad bacteria.

Probiotics are often promoted as a healthy option for many different health conditions. Research shows that probiotics may help with the symptoms caused by the following conditions:

- | Diarrhea from antibiotic use
- | Diarrhea from an infection
- | Irritable bowel syndrome
- | Lactose intolerance
- | Constipation
- | Ulcerative colitis.

The most common probiotic bacteria are from the Lactobacillus and Bifidobacterium species.

Probiotics are being added to a variety of foods like yogurt, juice, cereal, cheese, milk, ice cream, gum, candy and chocolate. You can also find them as supplements. There is no guarantee that the probiotics added to some of these foods will have health benefits. Only the company can tell you if they have research to prove that their product has health benefits.

For probiotics to work well, it is important that the right probiotic for each health condition be taken for the right amount of time. This handout will help you to choose the right probiotic for your health condition.



Steps you can take

Use “Eating Well with Canada’s Food Guide” www.healthcanada.gc.ca/foodguide to make healthy meal and snack choices.

Follow these tips to choose a probiotic product that is right for you:

- | Determine the type of probiotic strain that is needed to treat your health condition. Find a product that contains the probiotic strain. To help you, Table 1 below lists the probiotics and the products available in Canada.
- | Look for the correct genus, species and strain. You can find this information on the food or supplement label. It is the strain of the bacteria or yeast that is most important and determines if the product is going to work for a certain condition. For example Bifidobacterium longum R0157 breaks down into:
 - | Genus: Bifidobacterium
 - | Species: longum
 - | Strain: R0157

Take at least 100 million cfu/day to benefit from probiotics. However, the dose can vary for different health conditions. You may need to take an even higher dose for some health conditions. Check the product label to find out what the suggested dose is. Call the company or check the product website to learn more about their product. A reputable company will have scientific studies to support their products. Take the probiotic daily. Without a regular intake, probiotics do not survive in the colon for more than one or two weeks.

Store your probiotic supplements or foods properly to help ensure that they work.

- | Buy your product well before the expiration date.
- | Read the package for storage instructions. It is often recommended to store them in the refrigerator. Probiotics are very sensitive to temperature, air, light and moisture.

Aim for at least 10 grams of prebiotics each day. Prebiotics are a food source that helps the good bacteria grow and multiply in the colon. The most well known prebiotics are inulin and fructooligosaccharides (FOS). Inulin and FOS are found naturally in foods like chicory, artichokes, onions and garlic. Many food companies add prebiotics to foods, so check the label or ingredient list for amounts.

Table 1. Examples of Probiotics Researched in Humans

<i>Condition</i>	<i>Strain</i>	<i>Suggested Product*</i>
Irritable bowel syndrome (IBS)	Bifidobacterium infantis 35624	Align (capsule)
	Bifidobacterium breve, Bifidobacterium longum, Bifidobacterium infantis, Lactobacillus acidophilus, Lactobacillus plantarum, Lactobacillus paracasei, Lactobacillus bulgaricus and Streptococcus thermophilus	VSL #3 (sachet)
	LGG	Culturelle (capsule)

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Prevent Diarrhea from Antibiotics *must start taking within 24 hours of starting antibiotic	LGG	Culturelle (capsule)
	Lactobacillus casei DN-114001	Danactive (fermented milk)
	Lactobacillus acidophilus CL 1285 and Lactobacillus casei LBC80R	Bio-K (fermented milk)
	Saccharomyces boulardii	Florastor (capsule)
Diarrhea *must start taking within 24 hours of onset of diarrhea	LGG	Culturelle (capsule)
	Saccharomyces boulardii	Florastor (capsule)
Lactose Intolerance	Lactobacillus bulgaricus and Streptococcus thermophilus	Found in most yogurts
Constipation	Bifidobacterium lactis DN-173010	Activia (yogurt)
Ulcerative Colitis	E. Coli Nissle 1917	Mutaflor (capsule)
	Blend of 8 strains. See IBS above.	VSL #3 (sachet)

* Check the label for the suggested dose.

Special Considerations

- | Infants, pregnant women, or those with a weakened immune systems or major illness should speak with their health care provider before taking probiotics.
- | If you are allergic to milk or soy, be cautious. Some strains of

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probiotics are grown using a milk or soy protein. Check the food label or call the company.



Additional Resources

- 1 Health Canada, "Questions and Answers on Probiotics"
www.hc-sc.gc.ca/fn/an/label-etiquet/claims-reclam/probiotics_qa-gr_probiotiques-eng.php

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Notes

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