

Probiotics: Big Health Benefits in a Little Package

What are probiotics?

Probiotics are live microorganisms (bacteria) that normally live in the intestines. These are not infection-causing bacteria. They are “healthy” or “good” bacteria that help protect from infection and treat infection when it does occur.

Why take probiotics?

We have known that these bacteria act to treat digestive problems like diarrhea, constipation, and irritable bowel syndrome symptoms, but recent studies have also shown them to be protective against cold and flu symptoms. In children, taking probiotics can decrease fever, runny nose, cough, and the number of missed school days by more than 50%. Those taking probiotics also need antibiotics half as often as those not taking them. We predict the same benefits to be true for adults.

Are probiotics safe?

Since these bacteria are similar to those already living in healthy digestive systems, they are not harmful. Most people are already getting small doses in foods like yogurt and sourdough bread. Studies have shown that these supplements are very low risk; they do not cause harm.

What is the best way to take probiotics?

Probiotics come in capsules or powder. The powder can be dissolved in food or drink, so is easiest to give to children who are not used to swallowing pills. Make sure to avoid using hot food or drinks, though, as these can kill the cultures and eliminate any health benefit.

How much and what kind of probiotic should I take?

Choose a formula that contains at least *Lactobacillus acidophilus* (with or without *B. lactis*) in a concentration of 5.0×10^9 colony forming units (CFUs). The label will list the concentration just like any other medication dosage. Recommended dosing is 1 gram by mouth twice daily.

Please ask your doctor if probiotics are right for you.

Information from article: “Probiotic effects on Cold and Influenza-Like Symptoms in Children” *Pediatrics* 2009.