



Probiotics

WHAT IS IT?

Probiotics are living microorganisms from food or supplements that provide health benefits when ingested in sufficient quantities. Among the most commonly-used and best-studied probiotics are those in the genres of *Lactobacillus*, *Bifidobacterium*, and also the yeast *Saccharomyces boulardii*. The microbiome of our gastrointestinal tract is comprised of many different types of friendly, or commensal, bacteria that support digestion, reduce inflammation, regulate immunity, and even affect brain health and mood. A diverse and plentiful microbiome contributes to our overall health, but can be disrupted by medical conditions, infections, and antibiotics. Oral probiotics can help maintain or restore a beneficial microbiome.

WHO MIGHT CONSIDER TAKING THIS?

Probiotics may be useful for a wide variety of conditions, particularly those involving the gastrointestinal and genitourinary systems. In addition, probiotics may be helpful in a wide array of other conditions such as preventing eczema in susceptible infants and children or depression in adults. Probiotics are generally considered safe, and are often recommended whenever antibiotics are used, except in certain circumstances such as severe immune deficiency.

If any of the following conditions apply to you, ask your healthcare provider if you should consider probiotics:

- Taking or recently took prescription antibiotics
- Women's issues, such as recurrent bacterial vaginosis (BV)
- Gastrointestinal issues (infectious diarrhea, Irritable Bowel Syndrome (IBS), Inflammatory Bowel Disease)
- Pregnancy or breastfeeding to prevent eczema in your child if there is a history of allergy or eczema in the family
- Frequent upper respiratory infections
- Allergies
- Eczema

PREPARATIONS AND DOSAGE

Choosing and recommending probiotics can be tricky. While some conditions respond to probiotics regardless of the strains used, others have been shown to respond to very specific strains. Research is very active in this area and many questions remain.

It is generally advised to look for a probiotic that lists each bacteria by genus, species and strain. For example, *Lactobacillus* (genus) *acidophus* (species), DDS-1 (strain).

It is also important that the viability is listed. This typically appears on the label as cfu/g (colony forming units/ gram). Probiotics have varying levels of viability, ranging from 1 billion to over 100 billion cfu/g.

Read the product label: some probiotics require refrigeration and others are shelf stable. Some types of probiotics cannot survive transit through the stomach and should be enteric coated. Taking probiotics with meals may help to protect the bacteria from destruction by the stomach acid, increasing the likelihood of reaching the colon.

DOSE: Specific strains and doses vary depending on condition and should be recommended by your healthcare provider.

CONCERNS?

Probiotics are generally considered safe, even when used with other medications or supplements. Infants, children, pregnant and nursing mothers can use probiotics. Finding the right strain species, and dose for optimal health is key and should be discussed with your health care provider.

Caution is advised in people with compromised immune systems as some reports of blood infections have been reported. If you have an allergy to milk, check the label carefully as many products contain milk proteins.