

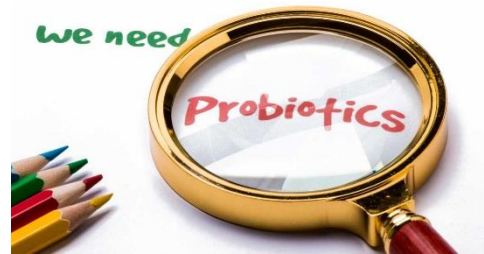
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**What are Probiotics?**

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Perhaps you've heard that they are in yogurt, or heard the term "good bacteria" at some point. These "good bacteria" are called **probiotics** and are found in our digestive system. Probiotics can be found in certain foods that have them added to them (yogurt, milk and cheese), as well as some fermented foods.

Research has shown some definite benefits for having these good bacteria outnumber some not-so-good bacteria in our digestive system. Someone may want to increase the good bacteria in their diet to:

- Reduce diarrhea and digestive upset while taking antibiotics (children and adults). Probiotics help re-populate the type and amount of good bacteria after the antibiotics remove both the good and bad bacteria.
- Help alleviate symptoms of irritable bowel syndrome (IBS) and/or ulcerative colitis

Two common strains (types) of probiotics that have been found beneficial are *Lactobacillus* and *Bifidobacterium*, you can look for these names on the probiotic ingredient list.

In order for a food like yogurt to have the term *probiotic* on the label there must be at least **1 billion cultures** found within the serving.

**Are Probiotics naturally found in food?**

Many fermented food products contain various types of "good" bacteria. Some examples are sauerkraut, kefir (fermented milk) and kimchi (Korean side dish). Although these contain good bacteria they can't be called "probiotics" as there is no guarantee in the amount of bacteria they provide.

**How much should you have?**

Although we've been eating fermented foods for centuries, the field of probiotics and related health benefits is fairly new, so an ideal amount isn't clearly known as these items are difficult to consistently measure in food.

**What about supplements?**

Probiotics can be taken in supplement form, which are regulated by *Canada's Natural Health Products Regulations*. It's not necessary for someone to take a supplement to have a healthy gut, but taking a probiotic supplement does provide a standardized amount of good bacteria. If you want to take a supplement it's best to talk to your doctor or registered dietitian to talk about which type might be best for you. Probiotics are fine for most people to take, but they may not be appropriate for those who are immunocompromised, and those with a milk allergy may not be able to take certain supplements that may be made from milk proteins.

Probiotics are the one of the fastest growing food segments in North America, so stay tuned to hear more great things these little bacteria powerhouses can do for our health!

Source(s):

World Health Organization. Guidelines for the Evaluation of Probiotics in Food. Available online:

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