

NUTRIeNT

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If you've been food shopping lately, chances are you have come across PROBIOTICS, foods that promise to help boost your immune system. Is there truth to this or is this food marketing hype?

Probiotics are **live** microorganisms (e.g. bacteria) that are either the same or similar to microorganism found naturally in the human body and may be helpful to your health. The gut is the largest immune organ in the body, housing 25% of the immune cells in the body that provide 50% of the body's immune response. It helps fight off harmful substances like other bacteria and viruses that can cause diseases like cancer.

People are looking for and willing to invest in products that can give their immune system a boost. Why?

Contributing factors may be recent global (and some closer to home) events that lead one to think about getting a little extra insurance in the gut bacteria department:

- Large scale infections resulting in illness and deaths (like H1N1, MERS)
- More pollution
- Our own decreased immune response as a result of personal stress
- Drug resistant infections as a result of antibiotic misuse

As far as the food industry goes, this has translated to more food products lining up store shelves with promise of immune fighting benefits. Probiotics can be expensive and buyers beware, as some products fall short of claims and are ineffective at best.

Health Canada, under the *Food and Drug Regulations*, allow the addition of live bacterial cultures (probiotics) as food ingredients. There are no current specific laws governing probiotics. In people who are generally healthy, probiotics are likely to be safe. Side effects may include mild digestive symptoms such as gas. On the other hand, people with serious underlying medical problems may have severe side effects such as dangerous infections. Always speak with your healthcare provider first.

Just because science suggests that probiotics may support immune health doesn't mean every product on the market offers the same advantages; not all products in the marketplace called "probiotic" have solid science backing them.

Recipe Corner:

Mango Lassi Smoothie

Makes: 2 servings Serving size: 8 oz

Ingredients

1 ½ cups 1% milk
 1 cup plain low-fat yogurt
 1 tbsp honey
 Dash of ground cardamom
 2 cups chopped, peeled ripe mango,
 frozen or about 2 medium fresh mango

Instructions

1. Combine first 4 ingredients in a blender; pulse to combine
2. Add mango to blender; process until smooth
3. Enjoy!



Nutritional Information: Cal 143 Fat 2.2g Pro 7g Carb 25.6g Fiber 1.3g Calcium 236mg

Things to consider before taking probiotics

- Discuss with your healthcare provider.
- There are two types of probiotics: bacteria and yeast. If you are taking antibiotics, bacterial probiotics will be ineffective.
- Not all probiotics are created equal. Read labels. Look for live bacterial culture.
- And quantity matters; the amount of live bacteria in food is measured in colony forming units (CFUs). Look for products that contain at least 3 -4 billion CFUs per serving.

References

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Top Foods with Probiotics

Not all probiotics have to be added in. Some occur naturally, although in lesser quantities. Give the following a try if you haven't already...

Yogurt: is one of the most familiar sources of probiotics. Probiotic *Lactobacillus bulgaricus* and *Streptococcus thermophilus* help break down milk sugar lactose and can be helpful for those with lactose intolerance. Some companies add other probiotics such as *Bifidobacterium animalis* like in Danone's Activia yogurt. There is limited information that this can aid in digestive problems.

Sauerkraut: can give your digestion a boost. Choose the unpasteurized kind, because pasteurization (used to treat most supermarket sauerkraut) kills active, good bacteria. This sour, salty food is loaded with immune-boosting vitamins that may help ward off infection.

Miso Soup: is a traditional Japanese soup made with miso paste which in turn is made by fermenting soybeans with salt and *Aspergillus oryzae* fungus. This food is loaded with immune-boosting vitamins that may help ward off infection.

Kefir: is a fermented, tart milk drink similar to a yogurt drink. Up to 90% of the bacteria are *Lactobacillus* strains. The rest is yeast probiotic. Be wary of high sugar content!

Sourdough Bread: San Francisco's famous sourdough bread packs a probiotic that may help digestion.

Sour Pickles: When looking to sour pickles for probiotics, choose naturally fermented kinds, where vinegar isn't used in the pickling process. A sea salt and water solution feeds the growth of good bacteria and may give sour pickles some digestive benefits.

A Word on Prebiotics



Prebiotics are **probiotic promoters**. Prebiotics may help with improving calcium absorption; lessening length, duration, incidence and symptoms of traveler's diarrhea; ease inflammatory bowel syndrome (IBS) symptoms; prevent allergies; reduce energy intake; increase the feeling of fullness and reduce appetite. But the science is still out. Many prebiotic foods are high-fiber so why not include them in your diet for other health benefits!

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