

Friendly Bacteria for Your Digestive System (Probiotics)

Did you know that your digestive tract contains more than 400 types of “friendly” bacteria? These little guys, commonly referred to as probiotics (which means "pro-life"), help reduce the growth of harmful bacteria and promote a healthy digestive system. It appears that when the digestive system is kept healthy, other body systems greatly benefit as well.

Probiotics are **live** bacteria with clinically-documented health benefits, and each type of friendly bacteria has a specific health benefit to the body.

Health Benefits

Probiotics may:

1. Protect against infection
2. Enhance and boost the immune system
3. Promote and improve digestive health
4. Alleviate diarrhea caused by antibiotic treatments
5. Promote urinary and genital health
6. Assist in the management of inflammation
7. Help alleviate symptoms of lactose intolerance
8. Improve some types of eczema in infants and children
9. Reduce cholesterol levels
10. Decrease the risk of certain cancers

Food Sources

Currently, foods that contain probiotics are primarily dairy products and dairy beverages, including:

- Yogurt
- Drinkable and squeezable yogurts
- Fluid milk with added probiotics
- Fermented milk
- Kefir (fermented milk drink which contains beneficial bacteria for the intestines, helping to promote health)

Through fermentation, probiotics enhance the flavor and texture of these particular dairy products. Dairy foods actually buffer your stomach acid and bile, thereby protecting the probiotics from the stomach acid so that they can reach the intestines.

Raw (unpasteurized) yogurt is loaded with bacteria. Most yogurts today are pasteurized and these bacteria are killed. However, some friendly bacteria are added back. Look for a yogurt that contains the “live and active culture” sign on the label. Pay close attention to the expiration date because these live bacterial cultures can diminish with time.

Probiotic Supplements

Probiotic supplements are available in a variety of forms, such as freeze dried powder, capsules, wafers, and liquids. Remember to exercise caution before using a probiotic supplement. Supplement and medication reactions can occur, therefore seek the guidance of your health care provider before using any probiotic supplement.

Reference: www.sparkspeople.com/