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The Truth About Probiotics

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With 70-percent of your body's natural defenses found in the gut, there's understandably much talk today about the benefits of probiotics. There's also much hype. It's important to understand the role that helpful probiotics play in your healthy diet. To help separate the science from the sales pitch, we turned to [Dr. Michael Shahani](#), Director of Operations of [Nebraska Cultures](#), who revealed 10 things you should know about probiotics.

1. Not all bacteria are created equal. Not all bacteria are bad. In fact, we need good bacteria to survive. These are called "probiotic" bacteria. The word "probiotic" means "for life."
2. "It's ALIVE!" [insert appropriate Dr. Frankenstein voice] Probiotics work because they are live bacteria that need to thrive in the human gut.
3. Probiotics need TLC. Don't abuse your probiotics—yogurt, kefir, pickles, sauerkraut, etc. Keep them cool and dry so they will be alive when they get into your body. For best results and for long-term storage, most probiotics need to be kept refrigerated.
4. You can fight disease with food. Probiotics displace and even help kill harmful bacteria like salmonella and E. coli.
5. We're overrun—but don't worry, it's okay. You have more bacteria in your intestines than there are cells in the rest of your body! The average person has approximately 100 trillion bacteria in their gut which represents ten times more than the number of cells in the body.

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6. Beware of probiotic imposters. Retail probiotics vary drastically. Some products might not have sufficient numbers of live bacteria in them to make them effective, and others might not be well-cared for, causing the number of live bacteria on the label to be incorrect. Look for the "live & active cultures," or LAC, seal on the product. The National Yogurt Association established a seal that is easy to identify on a product's label so you can be sure you are getting a quality product that meets the highest standards for probiotic supplements.

7. Your body is brimming with bacteria. The average human has 2 to 4 pounds of bacteria in their body! Within every human being is a flourishing, living colony of both beneficial and harmful bacteria. Most of these bacteria reside in the digestive tract (although some are found elsewhere, like the mouth, throat, and skin), and perform necessary functions for humans, such as helping break down food.

8. You were born with probiotics. Healthy humans are born with good bacteria already in their intestines. But due to poor diet, antibiotics, and other factors, we might need a probiotic supplement to maintain the healthy bacteria in our gut as we get older.

9. Bacteria has more benefits than you think. Not only are good bacteria essential for healthy digestion, there is more and more research showing that good bacteria can help fight "lifestyle" diseases such as tooth decay, diabetes, heart disease, and obesity.

10. Research is the only real proof of a high-quality product. It is important to look for products backed by quality scientific research. A fancy label or a few case studies or testimonials are not enough. And remember: Different strains are beneficial for different types of conditions. Look for the particular strain that clinical studies have shown to be beneficial for your condition. For instance, the University Of Maryland suggests using

probiotics that contain the strain *Lactobacillus acidophilus* for treating yeast infections, recommending 1 to 10 billion cultures per day.

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SHAPE'S EXPERTS ARE TALKING. JOIN THE CONVERSATION.



My New 'Home' on Shape.com by CynthiaSass - Apr 11, 2011

Hi everyone. I haven't posted here lately because my blogs and articles are now in a new spot on the site ...

Featured Poll

HOW DO YOU SIP YOUR WAY HEALTHY?

What do you want in a post workout beverage?

- Low fat and 0 cholesterol
- Nutrients like calcium and protein
- Anything low calorie

I mostly drink smoothies:

- As a quick & healthy breakfast
- After a workout
- As a yummy treat whenever

I drink milk because:

- I need the calcium
- I like the taste
- I don't drink milk

What milk alternative would you like to try?

- Soy milk
- Almond milk
- Coconut milk

My biggest health concern is:

- Weight management
- Proper nutrition
- Heart health

Where do you go to learn about the latest healthy drinks?

- Health and wellness websites
- Magazines

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