



Probiotics

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What are probiotics?

According to the definition by FAO / WHO, probiotics are: 'Live microorganisms which when administered in adequate amounts confer a health benefit on the host'. These bacteria are said to be beneficial for the body. Most probiotic foods contain bacteria of the species like *Lactobacillus* and *Bifidobacterium*.

It is said that consuming probiotics helps maintain a healthy balance of good bacteria in the digestive tract. Often, they are recommended after a course of antibiotics or as part of the treatment for gut related fungal infections.

How do probiotics work?

By including foods rich in probiotics, we can maintain a healthy gut flora and thereby, avoid potential health problems.

What are the benefits of probiotics?

- Probiotics have a lot of benefits for our health.
- Use of antibiotics sometimes alters the bacterial flora in the gut and thus exposing the person to the flourishing of disease causing strains of bacteria.
- Foods rich in probiotics can offset their side effects and also prevent further infections.
- Certain active strains may help lactose intolerant individuals tolerate more lactose.
- Probiotics could help in diarrhoea, irritable bowel syndrome, inflammatory bowel disease, skin and vaginal infections.
- Certain strains of probiotics can exert anti-carcinogenic effects by decreasing the activity of enzymes that generate carcinogens. Thus may reduce the risk of cancer.

- Some types of probiotics can also lower cholesterol levels, by breaking down bile in the gut and thus, inhibiting its re-absorption.
- Probiotics can also improve the body's immune function by influencing the immune system's defences and thereby help in building immunity.

What are their side effects?

Safety of the use of probiotics in young children, elderly people and people with compromised immune systems is yet to be proven. Side effects of probiotics tend to be mild and digestive (like gas or bloating). But they can also be serious leading to infections and unhealthy metabolic activities, if taken in excess.

What are the foods that contain probiotics?

They can be found in fermented food products such as yoghurt, fermented and unfermented milk, cabbage etc.

Source: Portal Content Development Team

Source: <https://data.vikaspedia.in/short/lc?k=i-vPZd7e8J7EAGa2ms6hHw>

