

# Health Tips

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with

Dr. D



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## Health Tip: Putting Probiotics to Work for You

Each of us has an estimated 100 trillion microorganisms normally inhabiting our gastrointestinal tract - can you imagine that?! To put this in perspective, there are about 10 times more bacteria in the gut than there are cells in the entire human body. Most of these microorganisms are beneficial, keeping harmful bacteria in check, aiding digestion and contributing to immune function.

For centuries, fermented dairy products have been thought to contribute to good health. Eating yogurt is often mentioned as one of the factors that contribute to the longevity of native people living in the Caucasus Mountains. It now appears



that "friendly" bacteria, also known as probiotics, found in fermented dairy products and yogurt may be the reason for the health benefits.

Experts have debated how to define probiotics. One widely used definition, developed by the World Health Organization and the Food and Agriculture Organization of

the United Nations, is that probiotics are "live microorganisms, which, when administered in adequate amounts, confer a health benefit on the host." Most probiotics are bacteria similar to those naturally found in people's guts, especially in those of breastfed infants (who have natural protection against many diseases). Most often, the bacteria come from two groups, Lactobacillus or Bifidobacterium. Within each group, there are different species (for example, Lactobacillus acidophilus and Bifidobacterium bifidus), and within each species, different strains (or varieties).

The National Center for Complementary and Alternative Medicine (NCCAM) and the American Society for Microbiology reviewed existing data regarding the therapeutic use of probiotics and have found them to be useful in the following situations:

1. To treat diarrhea, especially when it is due to a virus known as rotavirus.
2. To prevent and treat infections of the urinary tract or female genital tract. Like the intestinal tract, the vagina is a finely balanced ecosystem. The dominant Lactobacilli strains normally make it too acidic for harmful microorganisms to survive. But the system can be thrown out of balance by a number of factors, including antibiotics and birth control pills.

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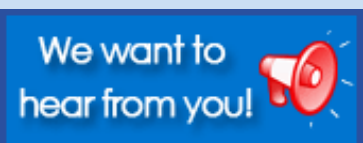
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Probiotic treatment that restores the balance of microflora may be helpful for such common female urogenital problems as bacterial vaginosis, yeast infection and urinary tract infection.

3. To treat irritable bowel syndrome and other bowel conditions. Clinical trial results are mixed, but several small studies suggest that certain probiotics may help maintain remission of ulcerative colitis and prevent relapse of Crohn's disease and the recurrence of pouchitis (a complication of surgery to treat ulcerative colitis).
4. To reduce recurrence of bladder cancer
5. To help treat an intestinal infection that is caused by a bacterium called *Clostridium difficile*
6. To prevent and manage atopic dermatitis (eczema) in children

Probiotics are available to consumers mainly in the form of dietary supplements and foods. Dietary sources include such foods as yogurt, fermented and unfermented milk, miso and some juices and soy drinks. Dannon's Activia yogurt, for instance, is an example of a probiotic food.



It's always a good idea to include your health care professional in any decision about your health. People who have compromised immune systems or have an underlying disease or gut condition should take probiotics only under the care of a doctor, and even then, should only take well defined and characterized products produced by reputable companies. For a wealth of additional information on probiotics visit the [USprobiotics.org](http://USprobiotics.org) website.

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