

From Prevention for



6 Good Reasons to Consider Probiotic Supplements

Go with your gut.

By Barbara Brody May 1, 2018



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Bacteria get a bad rap, and it's easy to understand why. After all, they can lead to strep and food poisoning, among other serious ailments. But all bacteria are not created equal—in fact, only 1 percent of the different types of bacteria have the



associate professor of medicine at the George Washington University School of Medicine and a physician in Bethesda, MD. "They live naturally in or on our bodies and can help maintain health and prevent damage."

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As you may know, your digestive tract is especially ripe with bacteria, and the good kind—a.k.a. probiotics—is normally hard at work doing battle with the bad guys in an effort to keep your gut and the rest of your body in tip-top shape. But sometimes the balance gets out of whack. That's where probiotic supplements like [Culturrelle](#) can come in.

Probiotics are found in fermented foods like yogurt, [kombucha tea](#), sauerkraut, milk, and even chocolate, says Mintz. Some healthy people are able to derive enough probiotics just from their diet, but you might not be getting as much as you think. For instance, "Yogurt is a commonly-used source of probiotics, but some yogurt preparations are pasteurized, which kills these healthy bacteria. Yogurt also contains lactose, so people who have stomach issues could get worse rather than better if they are lactose intolerant," Mintz explains.

Could a probiotic supplement help your health? It's possible, especially if one of the following issues resonates.



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1. You're not so regular.

If you tend to have bouts of constipation, diarrhea, or both, a "disregulation of the healthy and unhealthy bacteria in the gut might be causing it," says Mintz. Research shows that probiotics can help correct this imbalance and offer relief for gastrointestinal issues.



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2. You're always bloated.

Forget about six-pack abs; you'd just like people to stop thinking you're pregnant. If your tummy is frequently distended, probiotics might help flatten things out. Research has shown that they can decrease pain and flatulence and may reduce bloating and improve bowel movement frequency and consistency (which, in turn, cuts bloat) in some people with gastrointestinal symptoms.

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3. You have eczema.

Outside of digestive disorders, "the best evidence for probiotics to date is for an allergic skin condition called eczema, where allergic patients get skin that is irritated, red, itchy, and flaky," says Mintz. Several studies suggests that probiotics may help people with this condition, possibly by fighting off bad bacteria on the skin that would otherwise contribute to inflammation.

4. You're vacationing where "traveler's diarrhea" is common.

Worried about getting Delhi belly or Montezuma's revenge? If you're headed to a destination that's known for taxing the digestive systems of Western visitors, it's smart to plan ahead. One way to defend yourself: Start taking a probiotic before your trip and continue during your travels. A meta-analysis of 12 studies spanning nearly 30 years found that several types of probiotics can significantly cut the risk of developing traveler's diarrhea.



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5. Your vagina's itchy and smells weird.

"Bacterial vaginosis, or BV, is the most common cause of abnormal vaginal discharge in reproductive-age women, and it's usually caused by a change in the healthy bacteria that live in the vagina," says Mintz. While you'll need a prescription to treat BV (see your doctor), upping your probiotic game by taking a supplement might help maintain feminine health.

6. You're on antibiotics.

Your doctor writes you a script to fight a painful sinus infection, and the next thing you know you have the runs. What gives? "A common side effect of antibiotics is diarrhea," says Mintz. "Sometimes it's due to the medication itself, and sometimes it's the effect the drugs have on the naturally 'healthy' bacteria in the gut." Several studies have shown that use of probiotics can help treat and even prevent antibiotic-associated diarrhea. For instance, a [2015 research review](#) found that the probiotic *Lactobacillus rhamnosus GG* (which is the strain found in [Culturelle](#)) decreases the likelihood that both kids and adults

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the next time you need an RX).

Whatever your impetus for trying a probiotic, there's little risk in doing so, since most experts agree that these supplements are safe. That said, as with any supplement, it's a good idea to run it by your doctor first to make sure it's OK for you. If you do decide to try one, you may have to be patient: "For something acute, like antibiotic-associated diarrhea, you might respond in hours or days," says Mintz.

**Dr. Mintz is not affiliated with Culturelle and does not endorse any specific product.*

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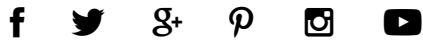
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