

Please Take One!



SUPPLEMENT OF THE MONTH: Probiotics

What is a probiotic?

Probiotics are live microorganisms (usually bacteria), which support digestion and the immune system. They are considered “good bacteria” because of their positive influence on the gut. The World Health Organization defines probiotics as “live microorganisms, which, when administered in adequate amounts, confer a health benefit on the host.” The two most common probiotics come from two groups of bacteria: Lactobacillus and Bifidobacterium. There are different species and strains in each of these different groups. Some probiotics are yeast.

Where is it found?

They are found in dietary supplements and in foods, such as fermented foods and cultured milk products. There has been some recent controversy over whether foods with supplemental probiotics, such as Activia, are effective.

What are the benefits?

Probiotics help with the immune system, protect against microorganisms that can cause disease, and help the digestions and absorption of food and nutrients. They have been shown to be effective for diarrhea, infant colic, IBS (Irritable Bowel Syndrome), respiratory tract infections in children, ulcerative colitis, pouchitis (a condition that may occur after removal of the colon), and atopic dermatitis. For some it may prevent the common cold, UTIs (urinary tract infections), and lactose intolerance. Since there are cells in the digestive tract connected to the immune system, it is believed that probiotics can affect the immune system’s defenses by altering the balance of “good” and “bad” bacteria.

Are there interactions with medications?

Taking antibiotics may decrease the effectiveness of probiotics. Also, ingestion of probiotics may negatively affect patients taking immunosuppressant. There is a risk that those patients have a higher risk of infection.

Side effects of taking probiotics are mild, if any. Some people complain of gas or bloating, which dissipates after continued use.