

# Go with your Gut for Good Health & Weight Loss too

**Ask the Dietitian!**  
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## Probiotics

You've likely heard the buzz about probiotics, but are they for you? And why exactly should you be consuming "bugs" anyway?

Within your gastrointestinal tract live a variety of microorganisms, including good and bad "bugs". These comprise your gut flora or "microbiome". The good bugs are mostly bacteria and some yeast. They support healthy digestion and immune function in several ways – they control growth of bad bacteria, synthesize nutrients, and help you to absorb other nutrients. So a proper balance is critical to health. Inadequate healthy bacteria can result from a variety of conditions including chronic illness or stress, poor diet, and medications.

Consider antibiotics, which are designed to destroy unhealthy bacteria. In the process, they also kill many good bacteria. This is why probiotics are often recommended during a course of antibiotics. *Probiotics* are foods or dietary supplements that replace or restore the beneficial bacteria in our bodies.

Probiotics have proven beneficial in people who suffer from chronic constipation, diarrhea, bloating, and gas. They also show promise in shortening a common cold or treating a yeast infection. Researchers are also examining their effect on other conditions including, eczema and arthritis.

Probiotics may even help with weight loss! Ongoing research is investigating the relationship between the gut flora and weight. Studies show that thin individuals have higher levels of certain healthy bugs in their GI tracts. In other studies, dieters who were given probiotics lost more weight than those who did not take them. It appears that those with fewer healthy bacteria may absorb more calories from food and store more as fat. This is still a new area of research, but is promising.

While they are not a magic bullet, most healthy people can benefit from the addition of *probiotics* to their diet. Probiotics are being added to a wide variety of food products, but the best bet is to get them from the foods that contain them naturally – yogurt and kefir are two of the best sources. If that is not possible, your doctor or dietitian can help you choose a quality supplement that matches your symptoms.

Some good food sources include:

- Yogurt with live cultures
- Kefir (a fermented milk drink made from cow's or coconut milk)
- Fermented foods: Sauerkraut, Kim Chee, Miso and tempeh (made from fermented soy beans), Kombucha tea (sip this instead of wine), Olives and pickles