Uncovering probiotics: what to look for on a label

Are all probiotics the same? No! Here's how to decode probiotic products.

Probiotics are live microorganisms that may have health benefits when consumed in certain amounts. There are many different strains of probiotics, and each strain can have a different effect on your health. Clinical research is needed on each specific probiotic strain to understand its unique health benefit.

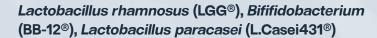
Understanding probiotic labelling

The three main things to look for when purchasing a probiotic are:



The probiotic strain

The strain of probiotic should be listed on the product. This can be recognised in different ways, such as:





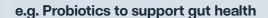






A description of the associated health benefit

A product should have details of the specific probiotic strain and the health benefit/s it has been studied for. There is usually a footnote referencing how the claim has been substantiated.







The amount of probiotics contained in each serve

This may simply be 'Billions of probiotics' or a number written on the nutritional panel. Most probiotics require at least one billion colony-forming units (CFUs) per serve to provide a health benefit. The dose required to attain the health benefit should be listed.







Probiotics Myths and Misconceptions

Probiotics are live bacteria that provide a specific and clinically demonstrated health benefit when consumed at the right quantity'

MYTH:

Are all probiotics the same?

FACT: No.

The health benefit of a probiotic product is specific to the particular bacterial strain it contains, not the more general bacterial genus and species.

For example, a product may be labelled Lactobacillus rhamnosus (the genus and species), but whether the strain is the Lactobacillus rhamnosus, LGG® probiotic is not known.



MYTH:

Are more probiotics better?

FACT: Not necessarily.

A probiotic product with more bacteria does not necessarily have more of an impact than a product with less bacteria. The amount of probiotic bacteria needed to be consumed depends on the specific strain and the associated health benefit demonstrated in clinical studies.

MYTH:

Do all fermented foods contain probiotics?

FACT: No.

Foods such as yogurt, kombucha, kimchi and sauerkraut and kefir are produced through a process called fermentation.

The bacteria used in fermentation adds flavour, texture and helps the product stay fresher for longer, but are not necessarily probiotic.



MYTH:

Do all yoghurts contain probiotics?

FACT: No.

Not all yogurts contain probiotics. All yogurts are made through fermentation, however these live bacteria are usually not probiotic. Probiotic bacteria such as Bifidobacterium, BB-12, Lactobacillus rhamnosus, LGG® or Lactobacillus paracasei, L. CASEI 431® can be added during the production of yogurt, making it a source of probiotic bacteria.

MYTH:

Do probiotic products with more than one strain work better?

FACT: Not necessarily.

The best probiotic product is the one that contains a particular strain (or particular combination of strains) that has been studied and associated with a specific health benefit.



¹ Hill C, et al. Nat Rev Gastroenterol Hepatol. 2014;11:506. (PubMed)



