

The Lowdown on **PRE-** and **PROBIOTICS**



What you need
+ why you need it

By **Amie Valpone**

Ten years of chronic illness has made me realize the importance of pre- and probiotics for our immune system. Before I got on the path toward healing, I never realized the impact our gut health had over the health of our entire body.

The word “probiotic” means “for life.” Probiotics are healthy, friendly, good bacteria living in our digestive tracts, which are responsible for nutrient absorption, breaking down our foods and supporting our immune system. They come in the form of whole foods as well as high-quality supplements.

Probiotics have become increasingly popular in recent years, especially with the rise of foods such as kefir, organic yogurt, kombucha, kimchi, miso and sauerkraut. “The path to a happy belly is paved with good bacteria. But in addition to helping with digestive problems, the right probiotics can help skin and joint problems, boost your immune system and even lift your mood,” says Dr. Frank Lipman, MD, founder and director of Eleven Eleven Wellness, NYC.

How do probiotics work?

According to Dr. Mark Hyman, MD, founder and CEO of the UltraWellness Center in Lenox, MA, there are 500 species and three pounds of bacteria in our gut. It’s a factory that helps us digest our food, produce vitamins, helps regulate hormones, excrete toxins and produce healing compounds that keep our gut healthy. Too much bad bacteria (yeasts, parasites) or not enough good bacteria (lactobacillus or bifidobacteria) can lead to serious damage to your health.

Not having enough probiotics in our diet can lead to frequent flus and colds, autoimmune disease, candida, digestive problems, skin issues and more unwanted symptoms and disorders.

Many years ago, before refrigeration and processed foods were created, people ate a good amount of probiot-

ics because they ate whole foods that were grown in nutritious soil, and they kept their food from spoiling by fermenting. Today, because of modern day farming with unnourished soil, the increase in processed foods, and the fact that so many people are eating non-organic foods such as milk, cheese, yogurt, chicken, turkey, eggs and other meats, which contain antibiotics that actually kill the good bacteria in our guts, we're seeing more and more health issues that stem from an unhealthy gut and an imbalance of good and bad bacteria that leads to unwanted symptoms and disease. This is simply one reason why it's so important to eat organic for a healthy gut and immune system. When you eat organic animal proteins, you are not ingesting antibiotics that are found in conventional animal products.

Why do we need prebiotics?

Probiotic foods are essential for overall well being and gut health, however, prebiotics help feed the probiotics.

"Prebiotics are undigested materials that support the growth and maintenance of probiotics living in the digestive tract, making both pre- and probiotics essential components to a healthy and balanced gut," says Dr. Lipman. "The best source of prebiotics is from food, particularly soluble fiber. Because of their dependent relationship, it is necessary to include both prebiotics and probiotics into the diet."

Prebiotics are found in foods such as raw jicama, leafy greens, artichoke, raw leeks, raw or cooked onions, raw garlic, raw asparagus, raw dandelion greens, underripe bananas and raw Jerusalem artichokes. These pass through our upper GI tract and do not get digested since our bodies cannot fully break them down. Therefore, it's important to make sure you are consuming both prebiotics and probiotics on a daily basis to keep our gut (where

over 70 percent of our immune system lives) healthy and happy! They maintain the balance and diversity of our intestinal bacteria, especially by increasing the amount of "good bacteria" we have. Because the health of our gut is so closely tied to our immune system, probiotics and prebiotics are a huge key to fighting inflammation in our bodies.

I've learned throughout these last 10 years of chronic illness that many health issues, which we wouldn't think were related to our gut health, actually stem from the poor health of our guts. Every Integrative and Functional MD that I've worked with always started my protocols by focusing on gut healing. I've seen clients and patients get rid of their eczema, arthritis and psoriasis by healing their gut, because a healthy gut leads to a healthy body overall.

TRY: Enzymedica (enzymedica.com), Dr. Ohhira (drohhiraprobiotics.com), Nordic Naturals (nordicnaturals.com), Natren (natren.com) probiotics

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Reasons for Gut Imbalance

- Taking antibiotics
- Eating non-organic foods full of antibiotics (dairy, eggs, meat)
- Chlorine in tap water
- Fluoride in tap water
- Pesticides in non-organic foods
- Radiation
- Taking steroids
- Stress
- Taking birth control pills
- Fertilizers

Tips for Gut Health

- Limit sugar, which feeds the bad bacteria in your gut
- Eat probiotic rich foods
- Eat prebiotic rich foods
- Eat whole foods, not processed foods (whole grains, fruits, vegetables, nuts, seeds and beans)

Talk to your MD about taking a probiotic supplement that is right for you. Do not start any supplements without first getting permission from your doctor. Working with an Integrative or Functional MD will help you learn what types of good and bad bacteria are living in your gut and how to rebalance your gut flora with the correct strains of probiotics.

Kimchi and other fermented foods are a great source of probiotics.

