

Probiotics: Intestinal Bacteria Good Guys

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News flash—there are creatures living in your intestines! No, they’re nothing like the scary thing that burst out of Sigourney Weaver’s stomach in the horror film *Aliens*. We’re referring to probiotics. They’re friendly bacteria.

According to WebMD.com, about 400 types of probiotic bacteria live in the gut. Also known as beneficial bacteria, they help maintain the natural balance of intestinal *microflora* (yes, another name for bacteria).

Probiotic bacteria reduce the growth of harmful bacteria, which can grow and flourish under certain conditions. For example, antibiotics can kill off good bacteria. When that happens, the gut’s microflora gets imbalanced, and wham—diarrhea hits. Antibiotics can also cause vaginal yeast and urinary tract infections.

So, should you take [probiotic dietary supplements](#) to rebalance microflora? Although there is clinical evidence that good bacteria can address certain medical conditions, it’s wise to check with your doctor first before using dietary supplements, especially when taking prescription medications.

Another way to grow friendly intestinal bacteria is by eating fermented food.

The largest group of probiotic bacteria in the intestine is [lactic acid](#) bacteria, also known as *lactobacillus acidophilus*. It’s also found in yogurt, the kind that’s labeled “with live active cultures.”

There are several other fermented foods that are thought to increase beneficial intestinal bacteria:



Tempeh [tem-pei], cake made from fermented soybeans



Miso [mee-soh], fermented seasoning paste made from barley, rice or soybeans



Sauerkraut [sou-er-kraut], German-style fermented cabbage



Kimchi [kim-chee], Korean-style fermented mixture of cabbage, vegetables, and sometimes fish



Yogurt, with live active cultures



Kefir [kuh-feer], a drinkable yogurt



Kombucha [kuhm-boo-chuh], fermented, mildly alcoholic beverage, sometimes added to tea

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