

Why Do I Need Different Probiotics?

Has your practitioner recommended you start taking a probiotic? A quick glance at any drug store can show a dizzying array of probiotic options, with some manufacturers touting multiple strains, others promoting single strains, and all claiming to have high CFU counts. Some say they promote gut health, while others say they help with respiratory health, immune health, feminine health, and more.

Whether you're wondering which to choose or unsure why your practitioner suggested a specific product, this guide can help to break down the confusion around probiotics.

What are probiotics?

So first things first: Probiotics are the tiny, "friendly" bugs that live in the gut and support a balanced and healthy environment.

They're "live microorganisms that, when administered in adequate amounts, confer a health benefit on the host."¹

Probiotics are known by their genus, species, and strain:

<i>Lactobacillus</i>	<i>acidophilus</i>	NCFM [®]
Genus	species	strain

You'll notice that some brands don't provide all three identifiers, and this should raise some red flags. When scientists study probiotics, they research at the strain level. So where lactobacilli may deliver some benefits, only specific strains studied in specific amounts can be proven to show certain benefits.

Different strains for different gains

How do you know which strains to look for? Your practitioner will guide you, but the following is a brief list of clinically studied probiotic strains and their health benefits.

Probiotic Strain	Health Systems Supported
<i>Bifidobacterium lactis</i> Bi-07 [®]	Gastrointestinal health, immune health ¹⁻³
<i>Lactobacillus acidophilus</i> NCFM	Gastrointestinal health, immune health ¹⁻³
<i>Bifidobacterium lactis</i> B-420 [™]	Body weight maintenance ⁴
<i>Bifidobacterium animalis ssp. lactis</i> BB-12 [®]	Infant health ⁵
<i>Lactobacillus rhamnosus</i> GG [®]	Infant health ⁵
<i>Lactobacillus rhamnosus</i> GR-1 [®]	Women's health ^{3,6-10}
<i>Lactobacillus reuteri</i> RC-14 [®]	Women's health ⁶⁻¹⁰

Colony-forming units (CFU)

You may have seen numbers like 1 billion, 5 billion, and 10 billion on probiotic labels, but what do these numbers refer to and mean?

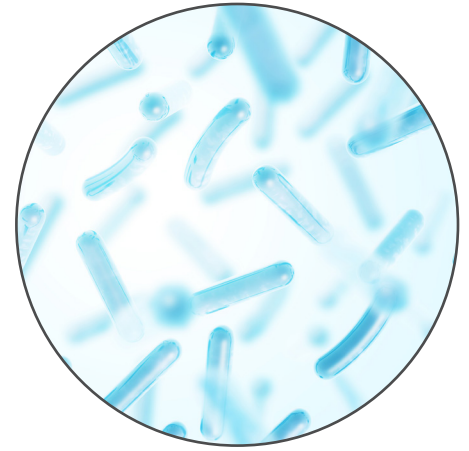
It's a myth that higher numbers mean better results. When scientists study probiotic strains, they do so based on a total number of colony-forming units (CFU). Probiotics that claim certain health benefits should contain the potency, or total CFU, based on published scientific and clinical data on specific strains that demonstrate clinical efficacy for those particular health benefits.¹¹

In other words, if a study on a specific probiotic strain indicates health benefits at a dosage of 10 billion CFU, any product touting that benefit should have 10 billion CFU. More does not necessarily mean better.

Time of production vs. expiration

Some manufacturers tout the CFU number at the time of production, but probiotics die over time. Due to manufacturing, shipping, and storage processes,¹² only products that guarantee potency at expiration assure reliable efficacy from start to finish.

Ready to add a probiotic to your daily regimen? Work with your practitioner to determine which probiotic strains would best support your health.



References:

1. Hill C et al. The international scientific association for probiotics and prebiotics consensus statement on the scope and appropriate use of the term probiotic. *Natur Revs Gastro Hepatol.* 2014;11(8):506–514.
2. Ringel-Kulka T et al. Probiotic bacteria *Lactobacillus acidophilus* NCFM and *Bifidobacterium lactis* Bi-07 versus placebo for the symptoms of bloating in patients with functional bowel disorders: a double blind study. *J Clin Gastroenter.* 2011;45:518-525.
3. Leyer GJ et al. Probiotic effects on cold and influenza-like symptom incidence and duration in children. *Pediatrics.* 2009;124:e172-e179.
4. Kang E-J et al. The effect of probiotics on prevention of common cold: a meta-analysis of randomized controlled trial studies. *Korean J Fam Med.* 2013;34(1):2-10.
5. Stenman LK et al. Probiotic with or without fiber controls body fat mass, associated with serum zonulin, in overweight and obese adults- randomized controlled trial. *EBioMedicine.* 2016;13:190-200.
6. Reid G. The scientific basis for probiotic strains of *Lactobacillus*. *Appl Environ Microbiol.* 1999;65(9):3763-3766.
7. Reid G et al. Probiotic *Lactobacillus* dose required to restore and maintain a normal vaginal flora. *FEMS Immunol Med Microbiol.* 2001;32(1):37-41.
8. Reid G et al. Nucleic acid-based diagnosis of bacterial vaginosis and improved management using probiotic lactobacilli. *J Med Food.* 2004;7(2):223-228.
9. Reid G et al. Oral use of *Lactobacillus rhamnosus* GR-1 and *L.fermentum* RC-14 significantly alters vaginal flora: randomized, placebo-controlled trial in 64 healthy women. *FEMS Immunol Med Microbiol.* 2003;35(2):131-134.
10. Reid G et al. Oral probiotics can resolve urogenital infections. *FEMS Immunol Med Microbiol.* 2001;30(1):49-52.
11. Sniffen JC et al. Choosing an appropriate probiotic product for your patient: an evidence-based practical guide. *PLoS One.* 2018;13(12):e0209205.
12. Govender M et al. A review of the advancements in probiotic delivery: conventional vs. non-conventional formulations for intestinal flora supplementation. *AAPS PharmSciTech.* 2014;15(1):29–43.

