

Prebiotics and Probiotics

By Sarah Remmer, RD

Prebiotics and Probiotics are components that are present in foods, or that can be incorporated into foods. Both yield health benefits related to their interactions with the gastrointestinal tract (GI Tract). There are over 400 different types of live bacteria that exist in your GI tract, many of which are beneficial and occur naturally in the large intestine.

Probiotics

Probiotic cultures, or sometimes called "good bacteria", are live microorganisms that, when consumed in sufficient amounts, can provide health benefits. Most cultures are able to survive the digestion process intact and deliver good bacteria to the large intestine, where they can contribute to the well-being of the digestive system. There are approximately 20 different species of Probiotics. Common examples are Bifidobacterium, Lactobacillus and L.acidophilus. A great way to incorporate probiotics into your diet is to have a yogurt a day!

How do they work/why are they good for us?

The effectiveness of probiotics is related to their ability to survive in the acidic environment of the stomach and the alkaline conditions of the duodenum (upper-intestine), as well as their ability to adhere to the intestinal lining of the colon. They have been shown to enhance the immune system, prevent unfriendly (bad) bacteria growth, decrease the incidence of GI problems like diarrhea, bloating, and gas, and improve overall digestive function.

Prebiotics

Prebiotics are non digestible carbohydrates that provide fuel for and stimulate growth in probiotics such as bifidobacteria. This contributes to healthy digestive function. Examples of pre-biotics are psyllium fibre (the fiber in All-Bran Buds) barley, inulin (extracted from the chicory root), leeks, artichokes, and garlic. There are many new items on the supermarket shelves that have these prebiotics incorporated into them. Examples are yogurts, pasta, cereals, and instant oatmeal. Make sure to look for "inulin" or "inulin fibre" in the ingredient list.

Who Knew??

If you would lay all the bacteria in your body in a row, that row would circle the earth 2.5 times!!