

What's That Stuff in My Yogurt?

The truth about probiotics and whether or not they are safe.

By Jennifer L. Sachs, RD

Have you noticed that the yogurt section of our grocery stores are being overtaken by yogurt products and drinks (which) apparently contain healthy bacteria such as Danimals, Yakult, Ativia and Dan-Active? These products seem to be the latest craze - but are they safe for both adults and children? Television commercials make claims of reducing infections and promoting a healthy digestive tract and many of these ads target women. Even the names sound scary... *L.rhamnosus GG, L.casei DN, B.animalis, and L.reuteri ATCC.*

You are not alone if you've taken pause at the suggestion that consuming bacteria could actually be good for your health. We hear horror stories of antibiotic-resistant strains of bacteria that have led to long hospitalizations or death. So why would we want to ingest more bacteria than we normally get from being exposed to germs in our environment?

As strange as they sound, these products also known as probiotics, have some good evidence to prove that they really are the straight shooters of the bacteria family. Probiotics are live bacteria found naturally in the body. These products, when taken in adequate amounts in our food or as a supplement, may have a beneficial health effect. The story behind their unusual names is, just as humans are given a first and last name to identify us as individuals, bacteria are organized in the same manner. For example *L.rhamnosus GG* actually stands for *Lactobacillus rhamnosus GG*. *Lactobacillus* is the "first name" also known as the genus, *rhamnosus* is the species and *GG* is the strain.

A good test for any nutritional supplement (or product) is to ask whether the health claims made for that product have good scientific evidence to back them up or personal testimonies based on emotion.

Because there are so many forms of probiotics, both as over-the-counter capsules and ingredients in some foods, it's also important to be informed as to which forms were tested in research studies and which ones might be best for you. If you read a review on a study about how probiotics can prevent travelers diarrhea, it's important to look into which strain was used in that specific study.

For example, in March, 2008, a study published in *The Journal of the American Society of Nephrology* showed that a common bacteria found in our intestinal tracts, *Oxalobacter formigenes*, may reduce the risk of kidney stones. Scientists are working on developing a probiotic supplement containing these bacteria.

Science supports other potential benefits of probiotics for a long list of health concerns including: allergies, cancer,



diarrhea, elevated blood cholesterol, *Helicobacter pylori*, high blood pressure, inflammatory bowel disease, immunity issues, lactose intolerance, prevention of dental cavities, and vaginosis.

Health Condition	Probiotic Name	Product Available
Infant diarrhea	L rhamnosus GG (LGG)	Culturelle (capsule) www.culturelle.com
	L casei DN 114001	www.danactive.com
	(Immunitas)	DanActive (fermented milk)
Inflammatory bowel conditions	8-strain combination of 3 Bifidobacterium strains, 4 Lactobacillus strains and S.thermophilus	VSL#3 (powder) www.vsl3.com
Diarrhea from antibiotics	S cerevisiae (S. boulardii)	www.florastor.com Lalflor (capsule) www.institut-rosell.com Florastor (powder)
	L rhamnosus GG	Culturelle (capsule) www.culturelle.com Danimals (drinkable yogurt) www.danimals.com
	L casei DN114001	DanActive (fermented milk) www.danactive.com
	L acidophilus CL 1285 plus L casei	BioK+CL1285 (fermented milk,capsule) ww.biokplus.com
Gut transit time	B animalis DN173 010 (Bifidus regularis)	Activia (yogurt) www.activia.com
Trying to stay healthy	L reuteri ATCC 55730	BioGaia chewable Gut Health Tablets, BioGaia Gut Health Probiotic Straws, www.everidis.com
	L casei DN114001	DanActive (fermented milk) www.danactive.com
Atopic Dermatitis (mostly with newborns)	L rhamnosus GG	Culturelle (capsule) www.culturelle.com Danimals (drinkable yogurt) www.danimals.com
Lactose Intolerance	Most strains L bulgaricus and/or S thermophilus	All yogurts with live, active cultures
Colic in infants	L reuteri ATCC 55730 (Protectis)	Reuteri drops www.biogaia.com
Immune support	B lactis HN019 (HOWARU orDR10)	Strain sold as an ingredient for dairy and supplement products-contact Danisco www.danisco.com
	B lactis Bb-12	Good Start Natural Cultures (infant formula) Yo-Plus (yogurt) www.yo-plus.com
	L casei DN114001	Danactive (fermented milk) www.danactive.com
Vaginal infections	L rhamnosus GR-1 plus L reuteri RC-14	Fem-Dophilus (capsules) www.urexbiotech.com; www.jarrow.com
Irritable bowel syndrome (IBS) symptoms	B infantis 35264 (Bifantis™)	Align (capsules) www.alingni.com

Despite the long list of potential benefits, it is important to understand that taking the wrong strain, or dosage, could be unsafe and you may not notice any health benefits. Another study, published in Lancet earlier this year, suggests that a probiotic supplement made up of a combination of strains could actually increase the risk of death in people who have predicted severe acute pancreatitis.

These products are not well regulated so talk to your health care provider or contact the manufacturer directly to obtain additional information.

***Product chart adapted from The Journal of the American Dietetic association article: "Probiotics and Prebiotics in Dietetic Practice" March 2008.**