

# GOOD FOR YOU

The immune system, which is made up of special cells, proteins, tissues and organs, defends people against germs and microorganisms every day. But not all bacteria is bad. Kohila Govindaraju, freelance nutritionist, takes a closer look at probiotics and prebiotics and cheers on the good guys who help you fight infection.

## Probiotics



Our bodies are host to billions of beneficial bacteria called probiotics! Probiotics are highly appreciated for maintaining a good immunal and digestive system.

Once in the intestine, probiotics grow and help us to maintain the most important functions such as digesting the food, stimulating immune system and fighting infection.

A wide range of probiotics exists but most are a series of Lactobacillus, Bifidobacterium,

Streptococcus thermophilus (the beneficial bacteria), yeast of the genus Saccharomyces, etc.

The term 'probiotic' means "for life". Ironically, probiotics have a very short life, just about two weeks. Sometimes the invasion of microorganisms that we are exposed to will naturally reduce the number of beneficial bacteria. In addition, the antibiotics taken when we are sick to kill the pathogens, kill the beneficial microorganisms in our intestine too. Hence, regular intake of probiotics will help us to maintain a normal intestinal system.

Probiotics are available in variety of food products, such as yoghurt, cultured milk drink, cheese, kim chi as well as capsules and tablets.

In general, while selecting food products containing probiotics:

- Look for words like 'live cultures', 'active cultures' or 'live and active cultures' on the label.
- Look for specific strains such as bifidobacterium, L.acidophilus or both.
- Check the expiry date because the cultures have a very short life.

## Prebiotics

Prebiotics enhance the growth of probiotics in the intestine.

Prebiotics are carbohydrates that our body cannot digest, but probiotics can digest them! Simply speaking, they are "food" for probiotics.

Inulin, fructo oligosaccharides, pectin, resistant starch, etc, are some of the prebiotics which aid in the process.

They are naturally present in whole grains, onions, raw bananas, garlic, leeks, greens, and in many fruits and vegetables.

Nothing beats good nutrition by strengthening our immune system. For optimal health, good food for the immune system is essential and plays a major factor in keeping our cells healthy. To achieve this effect, consume a healthy, balanced diet every day.

## References

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While the benefits of prebiotics have surfaced only in recent years, the effectiveness of probiotics has been recognised since the 19th century when French scientist Louis Pasteur postulated the importance of microorganisms in human life.