



PATIENT & CAREGIVER EDUCATION

Probiotics

This information describes the common uses of Probiotics, how it works, and its possible side effects.

Tell your healthcare providers about any dietary supplements you're taking, such as herbs, vitamins, minerals, and natural or home remedies. This will help them manage your care and keep you safe.

What is it?

Probiotics are made of good bacteria and yeast. The good bacteria helps to fight off issues caused by bad bacteria, such as problems with digestion and bowel function. Taking probiotics helps balance out the bacteria in your stomach and can help you feel better.

Probiotics are found in many foods and drinks like yogurt, kefir, miso, and sauerkraut, and cottage cheese. You can also take probiotics as a dietary supplement in many forms that include:

- Capsules
- Pills
- Powders
- Liquids

What are the potential uses and benefits?

Probiotics are used to help:

- Prevent and treat diarrhea (loose or watery bowel movements).
- Treat inflammatory bowel disease (swelling in your digestive tract).
- Prevent gastroenteritis (stomach flu with symptoms including diarrhea, cramps, nausea, vomiting, and fever).
- Reduce symptoms of irritable bowel syndrome (IBS) (an intestinal disorder that causes pain in the belly, gas, diarrhea, and constipation).
- Reduce side effects caused by cancer treatment such as diarrhea and stomach pain.
- Treat urinary tract infections (UTIs)

Probiotics also have other uses that haven't been studied by doctors to see if they work.

It's generally safe to have foods and drinks with probiotics

in them. However, talk with your healthcare providers before taking probiotics as supplements.

For more information, read the “What else do I need to know?” section below.

What else do I need to know?

- Talk to your healthcare provider before taking probiotics as a dietary supplement if you have a weakened immune system because of your cancer treatment. Some probiotics may cause harm.
- Talk to your healthcare provider before taking probiotics as a dietary supplement if you have a central venous catheter (CVC), such as an implanted port. Some probiotics may cause harm.
- Babies who are underweight, have umbilical catheters, or have low oxygen levels should not be given probiotics as they can cause harm.

If you have questions or concerns, contact your healthcare provider. A member of your care team will answer Monday through Friday from 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. Outside those hours, you can leave a message or talk with another MSK provider. There is always a doctor or nurse on call. If you're not sure how to reach your healthcare provider, call 212-639-2000.

For more resources, visit www.mskcc.org/pe to search our virtual library.

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