

[IMAGE]

Choose the Right Probiotic

By Christopher Oswald, DC, CNS

It is hard to find a store without a probiotic sitting on the shelf today. Whether it be the corner supermarket, co-op, or health food store, they all have many probiotic options, but how do you know which to choose? As a consumer it is very hard to know which is best and evaluating the options can be overwhelming.

When you look at the cost of probiotics, you will see that they can vary widely. This can be due to potency, purity, or the specific strains used in the product. Potency, which is how strong the probiotic is, can vary widely from product to product. I have seen potencies from 1 billion all the way up to 100 billion organisms per capsule. Another concern with potency is whether the product will be that potent at its expiration date, or how fast the live probiotics die off. A label may say that there are 20 billion CFU (colony forming units), but is that when it is manufactured, or can they guarantee that dose until expiration? This can make a huge difference because that 20 billion CFU product, might only have 2 billion live bacteria when you actually start to utilize the product.

Purity of the product is also of concern. As this product is composed of live bacteria you must be sure of exactly what bacteria are present. To ensure this I recommend that you purchase probiotics from manufacturers that you trust and who have transparency in regards to their quality processes.

There is a lot of research demonstrating the effectiveness of probiotics, but this research is typically done on specific strains. The strain is identified by a letter and/or number combination following genus and species name. For example *Lactobacillus acidophilus* NCFM (the strain is NCFM). Another well researched strain is the Bi-07 strain of *Bifidobacterium lactus*. This is important because if you read about some research that shows the benefits of a probiotic you should make sure that you are taking the exact same strain that is studied, otherwise you cannot be sure of the health benefits.

With all of the great news on the benefits of probiotics, it's no wonder you're looking for one to support your health. To be sure you get one that works, make sure you're getting a probiotic with good quality including potency, purity, and appropriate strains. It's best to check with your healthcare provider if you have any questions as to which would be best for you.

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