



Healthy Ideas

Probiotics: What You Should Know

(NAPSA)—While Europeans have embraced them for decades, Americans are becoming increasingly aware of the health benefits of probiotics, now sold over the counter in most pharmacies. Patricia Raymond, M.D., board-certified gastroenterologist, answers some commonly asked questions about probiotics:

Q: What are probiotics?

A: Probiotics contain live micro-organisms that provide intestinal health benefits when ingested in adequate amounts. Probiotics can be ingested through



foods or as dietary supplements available without a prescription. However, probiotics are not “one size fits all.” There are many different types of probiotics that utilize different strains of micro-

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organisms.

Q: What do probiotics do?

A: Your gastrointestinal tract is home to millions of live, healthy micro-organisms called “flora.” On occasion, external factors, such as taking antibiotics, being in the hospital, or eating foods and drinking local water in an exotic locale, can disrupt these flora and make way for more pathogenic micro-organisms to thrive. The result can be debilitating intestinal distress, such as severe diarrhea. Taking probiotics helps restore and maintain the balance of your good, natural flora.

Q: Does it matter which type of probiotic I take?

A: Yes. Probiotics are not all the same—some are bacteria-based and others are yeast-based, for example. For instance, a yeast-based probiotic, *Saccharomyces boulardii* (now sold in the U.S. under the brand name Florastor®), is best suited for antibiotic-associated diarrhea, among other things, since yeast cannot be killed by the antibiotic as bacteria-based probiotics can be. There are also types of probiotics best suited for constipation, gas and other issues. Ask your health care provider or pharmacist for a recommendation.

Q: Is there anything else I need to be aware of before I start taking a probiotic?

A: Read the package carefully to make sure it has at least 1 billion live micro-organisms and do some research. Florastor® has been sold around the world for more than 50 years and is clinically tested. It also comes in a children’s version, Florastor® Kids, which is safe for children 2 months of age or older.