

YOUR GUIDE TO Probiotics

Probiotics are defined as “live microorganisms that, when administered in adequate amounts, confer a health benefit on the host”^{1,2}



CLASSIFYING A PROBIOTIC

Probiotics must be properly classified, which means the microorganism must be defined using its full name on the product including the **Genus**, **Species** and most importantly, the **Strain**.¹

For example:

<i>Lactobacillus</i> (Genus)	<i>casei</i> (Species)	Shirota (Strain)
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A defined microbial content...

Probiotic effects are considered to be strain specific. They can't be extrapolated to strains within the same species, thus, it is important to know the exact strain that is present within a probiotic product. There are however, widespread effects seen across multiple probiotics.¹

Probiotics must state the number of microorganisms present within the product, as well as have sufficient quality control procedures in place to ensure that the correct strain and the numbers of the strain are present in the product at the end of its shelf life.¹

A health benefit...

In order to be considered a probiotic, there must be scientific evidence from controlled studies that show a health benefit on the host. If the probiotic is for human use, these must be human studies.¹

REGULATORY LANDSCAPE

Across the European Union (EU) and within the UK, foods can only carry a nutrition or health claim in accordance with EU* and UK** Regulations.

All health claims on food products across the EU and within the UK require an assessment of scientific evidence by the European Food Safety Authority (EFSA) or the UK Nutrition and Health Claims Committee (UKNHCC), respectively.

Currently, in the EU and UK, there are no approved health claims associated with the term 'probiotic', and therefore it is not permitted to be used on any product across much of Europe.³ It is felt that the term probiotic insinuates a health benefit and is therefore misleading to consumers.

The debate continues around what should be deemed sufficient, in terms of scientific evidence, to approve a probiotic health claim.³

However, there are some exceptions to this, even within the EU. Within Italy and Spain the term probiotic can be used, and there are also several countries outside of Europe that do allow the term probiotic to be used, including Canada and Japan.

*Regulation (EC) No 1924/2006

**Nutrition (Amendment etc.) (EU Exit) Regulations 2020

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IDENTIFYING PROBIOTICS

Any product with undefined microbial content and a lack of evidence to support a health benefit attributable to a strain can't be considered probiotic.

However, this does not mean there is no benefit to consuming these foods. Examples include fermented foods such as kefir, yoghurt and sauerkraut.¹



WHAT TO LOOK FOR WHEN CHOOSING A PROBIOTIC

Characterisation

The probiotic should fully characterise the microbial content to strain level and indicate the numbers present in the product.¹

Safety

Ensure there is sufficient evidence to support the safe use of the specific strain of bacteria in the relevant population group (considering age and/or health conditions).^{1,4}

Careful consideration, caution and close monitoring of patients is needed if administering probiotics via a feeding tube, particularly via a nasojejun tube alongside enteral nutrition containing a high dose of fermentable sugars, or to patients in a critical condition.^{1,5}

Stability

There must be sufficient quality control mechanisms in place to ensure the correct strain and correct numbers of said strain are present within the product at the end of its shelf life.⁶

Survival

Probiotics are thought to have their effect in the colon, the most densely populated area of the gastrointestinal tract. It is therefore imperative that the probiotic strain survives through the gastrointestinal tract and can transiently colonise the colon. This survival is measured using stool samples.¹

Scientifically documented health benefit

Probiotics must have controlled studies that demonstrate the probiotic has a health benefit.¹

Pay attention to the dose - doses used should be the same as that used in the controlled studies showing a benefit for the health condition you wish to use it for.^{1,6}

REFERENCES

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