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Benefits of probiotics for infants

By Dr. Dina Kulik, pediatrician

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Benefits of probiotics for infants

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When baby is born, it has yet to be exposed to any good or bad bacteria from the outside world. But, over the days and weeks after birth, he or she is exposed to new bacteria, viruses and other microorganisms like yeast. All of this helps to build baby's [healthy gut flora](#) ^[6], which is essential to an infant's gut health and immune system and has been shown to have an effect on his or her overall health in later life.

Gut bacteria: the good, the bad, the benign

Did you know that trillions of bacteria live in baby's GI tract? Many of these are 'healthy' bacteria which keep the amount of 'bad' bacteria, viruses and yeast in check. In fact, these bacteria have been there since your baby was born, when he or she passed through the birth canal and picked up some of your microbes. Babies born via C-section miss out on this collection of bacteria during delivery, but typically end up with the same amount and mix by about six months of age.^[i]

Immune benefits of probiotics

Experts agree that [breast milk is the best nutrition](#) ^[7] for baby, and breastfeeding is the best way to provide [probiotics](#) ^[8]. Probiotics are live, safe microorganisms, or 'good bacteria' that are naturally found in breast milk and can also be found in certain baby formulas, other foods, and natural health products. Probiotics can provide certain health benefits, contributing to the development of healthy gut flora and a strong immune system. ^[ii] Bifidobacteria are one type of good bacteria^[iii] and account for up to 90% of the total naturally occurring bacteria found in the gut of healthy, breastfed babies.^{[iv],[v]} It may even bring the flora of formula fed infants to be similar to breastfed infants.^[vi]

Learn more about [what to look for in infant probiotic products](#) ^[9] now.

Probiotics beyond immunity

Although scientific studies looking at probiotics have shown promising results in the prevention and treatment of common diseases such as allergy and diarrhea in infants and children,^[vii] there is still more work to be done to conclude other medical benefits there may be for healthy infants. There is some evidence that colicky infants who took *Lactobacillus reuteri*, another probiotic, cried less than babies given a medical treatment for gas called simethicone.^[viii] Learn more about [colic and managing colicky babies](#) ^[10] now.

Though studies are ongoing, probiotics are considered safe for healthy babies and children and are worth discussing with your pediatrician. Speak with your doctor about safe and effective sources of probiotics for your baby.

This article has been sponsored by Nestlé Baby & me, but all comments and opinions are my own.



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Dr. Dina Kulik is a pediatrician and emergency doctor based in Toronto. She is the founder of Kidcrew Pediatrics, and works at the Hospital for Sick Children (SickKids). Dr. Kulik is also Assistant Professor at the University of Toronto. An expert on children's health, Dr. Kulik often speaks out on topics such as breastfeeding challenges and solid food introduction.

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[vii] Marchand V, Canadian Paediatric Society, Nutrition and Gastroenterology Committee. Using probiotics in the paediatric population. *Paediatrics & Child Health* 2012;17(10):575; reaffirmed February 26, 2015.

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[6] <https://www.nestlebaby.ca/en/probiotics/ins-and-outs-of-babies-digestive-system>

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[10] <https://www.nestlebaby.ca/en/managing-colicky-babies>

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