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## What are probiotics?

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## What are probiotics?

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You may have noticed over the past few years that there has been a growing interest in probiotics. Experts such as researchers, physicians and nutritionists have been studying these good bacteria to better understand the impact they have on our health and the health of our children.

## What are probiotics?

According to the World Health Organization, probiotics are living microorganisms (like bacteria and yeast) that when consumed in sufficient quantities, can be beneficial to our health. <sup>[i]</sup> These microorganisms play an essential role in the intestine and must be active to balance the gut flora.<sup>[ii]</sup>

## The role of probiotics in our health

Probiotics are good bacteria that are beneficial to our bodies, specifically our digestive and immune systems <sup>[6]</sup>. Probiotics constantly interact with the gut flora that live in our digestive tract and contribute to the health of our immune system <sup>[6]</sup>. Researched and recognized by the scientific community, the gut flora are a delicately balanced community of more than 500 different types of bacteria.

There are different strains of probiotics and they are each unique in their characteristics and the benefits they have on health. Bifidobacteria and lactobacilli are common types of probiotics found in food. These specific types of good bacteria can help balance the gut flora.<sup>[iii],[iv]</sup>

Did you know that bifidobacteria represent up to 90% of the naturally occurring bacteria in the intestines of healthy breastfed babies?<sup>[v],[vi],[vii]</sup>

## A constantly changing gut flora

The length of your pregnancy, your age, your health status, the type of delivery, whether you breastfeed <sup>[7]</sup> or formula-feed <sup>[8]</sup>, the environment in which your child grows up, his or her diet, and the use of medication—specifically antibiotics—will all have a significant and lifelong impact on the makeup of your child's gut flora <sup>[9]</sup>.

### In utero:

While in utero, your baby has not yet been exposed to good or bad bacteria from the outside world.

### Vaginal childbirth:

During childbirth, good bacteria - specifically lactobacilli and bifidobacteria— will transfer to your baby.

### Caesarean delivery:

In the case of a C-section, the transfer of bacteria is influenced more by the environment in the delivery room such as the air, the healthcare personnel treating your child, and your skin flora. Therefore, the flora of a baby born by C-section will develop differently than the flora of a baby born vaginally.

As your child grows, bacterial populations will increase and diversify over time. The gut flora will reach a certain maturity by two years of age. Remember that promoting a diverse diet and using probiotic supplements, if necessary, is the best way to ensure that you take care of your child's gut flora from an early age.

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



### **Charlotte Geroudet, RD**

Charlotte Geroudet is a member of the Ordre professionnel des diététistes du Québec. She has a degree in nutrition from Université Laval and a certificate in dietary techniques from Cégep de Limoilou. In 2010, she founded Nutrition Québec, a company that specializes in healthy weight management, child nutrition and the prevention of chronic illnesses. Charlotte is regularly asked by the media to discuss various nutrition topics; she is also a blogger, columnist, lecturer and co-author of two successful books. Her philosophy is to make principles of healthy eating accessible and appealing.

[i] Rapport de consultation mixte d'experts FAO et OMS sur l'évaluation des propriétés nutritives et bonnes pour la santé des probiotiques contenus dans les aliments, dont le lait en poudre contenant des bactéries lactiques vivantes, octobre 2001.

[ii] Rapport de consultation mixte d'experts FAO et OMS sur l'évaluation des propriétés nutritives et bonnes pour la santé des probiotiques contenus dans les aliments, dont le lait en poudre contenant des bactéries lactiques vivantes, octobre 2001.

[iii] <https://www.cps.ca/fr/documents/position/probiotiques-au-sein-de-la-population-pediatrique#ref1>

[iv] Savino F, Bailo E, Oggero R et coll. Bacterial counts of intestinal Lactobacillus species in infants with colic. *Pediatr Allergy Immunol* 2005;16(1):72-5.

[v] Saavedra J.M. *Nutr Clin Pract* 2007; 22:351-65.

[vi] Yoshioka, H., et coll. *Pediatrics* 1983; 72: 317-21.

[vii] Savino F, Cresi F, Pautasso S et coll. Intestinal microflora in breastfed colicky and non-colicky infants. *Acta Paediatr* 2004;93(6):825-9.

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[5] <https://www.nestlebaby.ca/en/printpdf/1919421>

[6] <https://www.nestlebaby.ca/en/probiotics/role-probiotics-babys-immunity>

[7] <https://www.nestlebaby.ca/en/0-6-months/breastfeeding/benefits-breastfeeding>

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

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