

Practical Guidance for Probiotics

Introduction

Probiotics are defined as, "live microorganisms that, when administered in adequate amounts, confer a health benefit on the host." Unlike traditional drugs, most probiotics are classified as **dietary supplements**, requiring less rigorous review of safety and efficacy data prior to hitting the market. To ensure residents are receiving products safe and appropriate for their condition, consider the following probiotic label components prior to initiating therapy.

Indications for Use

In general, probiotics are intended to re-establish and maintain beneficial microorganisms within the digestive tract to promote overall gastrointestinal health and wellness. Additional indications and health benefits have emerged following findings from new research and clinical trials.

In 2023, the World Gastroenterology Organization published its [Global Guidelines on Probiotics and Prebiotics](#) to summarize available research supporting use of probiotics in specific conditions such as:

- ✓ Antibiotic-Induced Diarrhea
- ✓ Irritable Bowel Syndrome (IBS)
- ✓ Lactose Intolerance
- ✓ Nonalcoholic Fatty Liver Disease
- ✓ Prevention of *C. difficile* Diarrhea
- ✓ Treatment of Acute Diarrhea

Choosing a Probiotic

Typically, most people are able to tolerate probiotics well, however, limited regulatory oversight of ingredients and product labeling can pose a significant safety risk. Below, four key steps have been highlighted to aid in identifying a safe and appropriate probiotic product.

1. Know the Strain

- Probiotics are labeled according to their **strain**, or genetic subtype.
 - For greater specificity of bacteria, labels will also include **genus** and **species** names before the strain type.
- Each probiotic strain has unique characteristics and therapeutic benefits, setting it apart from other strains within the same species.
- Depending on the intended use, probiotics may contain more than one type of strain.

Example:
Align® Digestive Support

Bifidobacterium

Genus

longum

Species

35624

Strain

2. Do Your Research

- Conduct preliminary research online to see what strains are recommended for the condition being treated.
 - Is information mainly available from clinical trials or social media platforms?
- Look for probiotics that are manufactured by reputable brands.
 - Is the probiotic from a well-known brand?
 - Is information about product quality and manufacturing process readily available on the manufacturer's website?
- Has the probiotic product undergone additional third-party testing?
 - **Third-party testing** refers to the independent evaluation of the quality and safety of a product by an unrelated organization.
 - For example, the [United States Pharmacopeia \(USP\)](#) certifies products that adhere to standards set forth by the [FDA's Current Good Manufacturing Practices \(CGMP\)](#).

3. Review the Label

- When selecting an appropriate probiotic, carefully review the label's main components to learn more about the products contents and intended effects.
 - **Recommended Use:** expected benefits of the probiotic.

For all structure or function claims, the FDA requires, by law, that dietary supplements clearly display following the disclaimer:

"This statement has not been evaluated by the Food and Drug Administration. This product is not intended to diagnose, treat, cure, or prevent any disease."

- **Species, Genus & Strain:** specific strain(s) included in the product.
- **Colony Forming Units (CFU):** number of live bacteria present within the probiotic.
- **Storage Instructions:** proper storage requirements to preserve product integrity.
- **Expiration Date:** how long a probiotic will contain therapeutic levels of live bacteria.

4. Ask Before Taking

- Since probiotics are comprised of live bacteria, they may not be suitable for use in certain high-risk populations.
- Due to the potential for adverse events, providers may recommend **avoiding** probiotics in specific groups of people, such as:
 - Individuals with suppressed immune systems, active infection, or acute illness as probiotics can cause or worsen infections.
 - Individuals with severe symptoms or chronic, undiagnosed symptoms, as their condition should first be evaluated by their primary provider.
- Pharmacists also serve as a great resource for probiotic-related questions as can they assist in initial research efforts and are able to assess the resident's medication regimen for **interactions**, including:
 - Susceptibility of probiotic strains with concomitantly prescribed antibiotics.

- Risk of infection with co-administration of immunosuppressant medications.
- Potential implications on efficacy of yeast-based probiotics when administered with antifungal medications.
- Viability of probiotic strains when administered with medications that alter gastric pH (e.g., proton pump inhibitors).

Storage Considerations

Because probiotics are comprised of live bacteria strains, proper storage is essential to ensuring these microorganisms remain viable until time of use. The table below highlights storage requirements for popular probiotic supplements and supplemented foods.

Brand Name	Storage*
Probiotic Supplements	
Align® Digestive Support	Room Temperature
Bio K+® Daily Support	Refrigeration
Culturelle® Digestive Daily	Room Temperature
Floragen® Digestion	Refrigeration or Room Temperature up to 2 Weeks
Florastor® Dual Action	Room Temperature
Jarro-Dophilus® EPS	Room Temperature
Phillips® Colon Health	Room Temperature
UltraFlora® Balance	Refrigeration
UP4® Men's	Refrigeration
Visbiomeo® GI Care	Refrigeration or Room Temperature up to 1 Week
Functional Foods with Probiotics	
Activia® Probiotic Yogurt	Refrigeration
DanActive® Probiotic Dairy Drink	Refrigeration
GoodBelly® Probiotic Juice	Refrigeration

*Refrigeration (2°C to 8°C); Room Temperature (20°C to 25°C)

Resources

1. [Probiotics, Prebiotics, Synbiotics, Postbiotics and Fermented Foods Defined. International Scientific Association for Probiotics and Prebiotics, 2024.](#)
2. [Global Guidelines - Probiotics and Prebiotics. World Gastroenterology Organization, Feb. 2023.](#)
3. [Dietary Supplement Labeling Guide: Chapter VI. Claims. U.S. Food & Drug Administration, April 2005.](#)
4. Overview of Commonly Used Probiotics. Creighton University; Center for Drug Information & Evidence-Based Practice, Aug. 2025.