

## “Good” Bacteria and Your Health: An Interview With Leading Harvard Probiotics Expert

(NAPSA)—Would you be surprised if your doctor told you that you should be eating more bacteria? The fact is, consuming “good” bacteria—known as probiotics—can offer important health benefits, such as helping to regulate the body’s immune system and improving other bodily functions such as digestion, regularity and detoxification.

Literally meaning “good for life,” probiotics are beneficial bacteria that can help impact the balance of bacteria in the digestive tract. As a component of fermented milk products, probiotics are a functional food that has been around for thousands of years. They first came under the modern microscope in the early 20th century, when Nobel Prize-winning scientist Eli Metchnikoff discovered a possible correlation between Bulgarians’ renowned longevity and their regular consumption of yogurt.

“The benefits of probiotics have been known since ancient times and have been part of European culture for many years,” noted Dr. Allan Walker, director of the Division of Nutrition at Harvard Medical School in Boston and author of “Eat, Play and Be Healthy” (McGraw Hill). We caught up with Dr. Walker to find out more about probiotics.

### **Q. How do probiotics work?**

A. About 70 percent of your body’s immune system is located in the digestive tract. Consuming probiotics can help strengthen the body’s natural defenses by providing a regular source of “good” bacteria to the intestinal tract, helping to correct an imbalance of “good” and “bad” bacteria, and optimizing the functioning of the immune system and intestinal lining. Research shows that regular consumption of certain probiotics increases the number of “good”



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bacteria in the intestines, which, in certain cases, can have beneficial effects on health. Researchers have studied the potential role of probiotics on constipation, colon cancer, diarrhea, irritable bowel syndrome and immune function, among others.

### **Q. What’s the best way to consume probiotics?**

A. It’s best to take probiotics on a daily basis, preferably by consuming yogurt and cultured probiotic dairy drinks. As foods, these yogurts and drinks are easy to incorporate into your overall diet and, in addition to the probiotics cultures, provide valuable nutrients, such as calcium, phosphorus, and potassium.

### **Q. Who can benefit from probiotics?**

A. Virtually everyone. In fact, new research suggests probiotics may have a role in the health of infants and children during the developmental years.

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