

PROBIOTICS (What are they?)

What are probiotics?

Probiotics are defined as “live microorganisms which when administered in adequate amounts confer a health benefit on the host.” These organisms are identical to those commonly found in fermented food products such as yogurt, sour cream, sauerkraut, and buttermilk.

In recent years, there has been increasing interest in the use of probiotics for the treatment and prevention of inflammatory bowel disease, infectious and antibiotic associated diarrhea, including necrotizing enterocolitis, and other disorders such as atopic dermatitis and recurrent urinary tract infections.

Are probiotics safe for my baby?

Probiotic supplements are generally regarded as safe since the organisms that comprise these supplements are identical to those in human gastrointestinal and vaginal flora. Probiotics are available over the counter, but are not regulated by the Food and Drug Administration. This lack of monitoring necessitates careful use and evaluation by a clinician. Invasive infections attributed to probiotic supplementation in infants and children are exceedingly rare. Probiotic supplementation should be used with caution in children with an IV, prolonged hospitalizations, and a compromise of gut integrity.

What research has been done on probiotics?

There is a growing body of literature describing studies of probiotics in children. Recent work has focused on the use of probiotics in the primary prevention of disease, as opposed to the treatment of chronic conditions. The hygiene hypothesis suggests that early environmental factors can affect immune system development and lead to atopic conditions (such as asthma, eczema or allergies). The theory proposes that the absence of exposure to dirt, due to increased household cleanliness in the United States, may lead to unfavorable immune system development. Probiotics serve as a promising and practical exposure that may aid in immune system development.