

# What Probiotics Do for Your Skin

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You've probably heard about probiotics and how good they are for your digestive health. Now doctors say probiotics are also good for the health of our skin. Skin is our body's largest organ, and it's the body's first line of attack to protect against physical, bacterial, chemical, fungal or other "assaults." It sometimes suffers from conditions such as acne, rashes and eczema, and probiotics can help prevent skin issues and reduce symptoms.



But what are probiotics? Where do you find them, how do you take them, and what exactly do they do for your skin? Here's what to know about probiotics and skin health.

## What Are Probiotics?

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Probiotics are live bacteria and yeasts similar to the "friendly bacteria" we already have in our digestive system. Though we sometimes think of bacteria as being bad, our body is host to both good and bad bacteria. Probiotics are the good type; they help keep our digestive and immune systems healthy and functioning well. The word "probiotics" means "for life." And the benefits of probiotics extend to our skin health, too.

## Where to Find Probiotics and What to Look For

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A good source of probiotics is live culture yogurt. Look for "Live and Active Cultures" on the yogurt's label. That means the yogurt has at least 100 million active cultures per gram. You can also get probiotics from kefir, acidophilus milk, some cheeses, sourdough bread, miso soup, kimchi, and other fermented foods. There are over-the-counter probiotic supplements in the form of capsules, tablets, and skin creams, as well.

Probiotics can contain different types of bacteria; the most common strains are those in the *lactobacillus* and *bifidobacterium acidophilus* families, which we already have in our digestive systems.

## Probiotics for Skin Health

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We can get probiotics not only through food but also by applying them topically in a cream. Whether you take them internally or apply them externally, here's why probiotics are great for skin:

- Probiotics help with acne and rosacea. Putting probiotics directly onto the skin forms a protective shield that keeps skin cells from coming into contact with “bad bacteria” and parasites. This keeps the immune system from triggering a reaction that causes inflammation, redness, acne, and other symptoms.
- Taking probiotics orally is helpful in treating allergic rhinitis—also known as hay fever, although researchers are still determining the best probiotic strains and timing of dosages.
- In a study, pregnant women who took probiotic supplements in their last few weeks of pregnancy and while breastfeeding, or added probiotics to their baby's infant formula, seemed to lessen the odds of their babies getting eczema up to at least 2 years old.
- Probiotics may help hydrate aging skin, protect against sun damage, and make wrinkles less noticeable.

## Before You Use Probiotics

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A lot of our knowledge about the safety of probiotics comes from studies of *lactobacillus* and *bifidobacterium*. We don't know as much about other strains. We also don't know a lot yet about the long-term safety of probiotics. And some probiotic products are found to contain fewer live microorganisms than reported or different bacterial strains than what the label says. A side effect of probiotics is that some people experience gas in the first few days of taking them.

Most healthy adults can successfully take foods or dietary supplements containing probiotics. They have a good safety record in people who are generally healthy.

But people with underlying health problems should not take probiotics, and taking them might not be safe if you have a weakened immune system or frequent infections. Premature infants and children with abnormal immune function, autoimmune disorders, and immunocompromised hosts should not use probiotics. Your doctor might recommend not taking them if you have pancreatitis, are taking antibiotics or other medication affecting your immune system, or are being treated for a fungal infection. Pregnant woman, young children and infants should use probiotics with caution. Consult your doctor before starting any skin product or treatment.

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