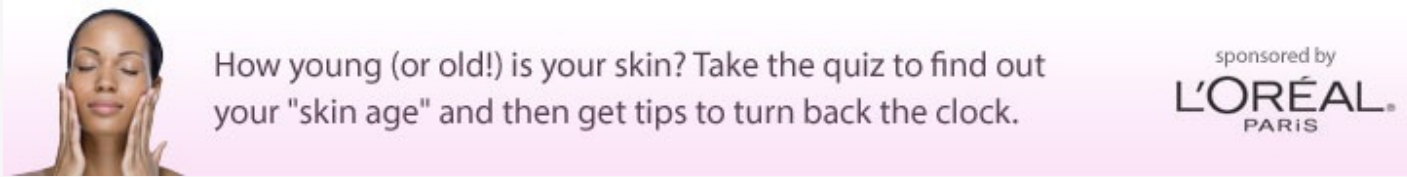


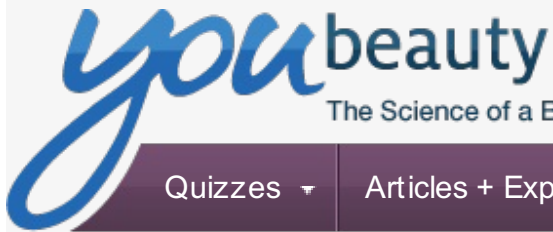
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By [Amanda Schupak](#) August 16th, 2012 Tags: [Health Advice](#), [Healthy Living](#), [Alternative Medicine](#), [Supplements](#)
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Gut Reaction

Your intestines are teeming with bacteria—and that's how it should be. But sometimes even good bacteria need a helping hand. That's where probiotics and their benefits come in.

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If you were to take a microscopic look inside your body, you'd find—are you ready?—trillions of organisms living in just about every part of you, from the skin of your elbow to inside your mouth, nose and (yup) vagina. A consortium of scientists recently completed what is effectively the 2012 Census of the micro-metropolis that is the human body and found that microscopic organisms outnumber your own cells 10-to-1.


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Don't freak out. This is normal. In fact, these masses of microbes are integral to keeping your systems working smoothly, especially when it comes to digestion. (And we do mean masses—to the tune of one to two pounds of bacteria in you at all times.) Most of these

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microorganisms reside in your digestive tract and work together to help you break down food and absorb nutrients.

“You couldn’t survive without them,” says Sharon Richter, R.D. “And you need them all because they work in conjunction with each other.”

These microorganisms also play a supportive role in the immune system and create a protective barrier to help ward off invading pathogens from outside.

But some things can throw off the delicate balance of your gut bacteria, including illness, diet, stress and antibiotics, which are meant to kill bad bacteria that make you sick, but can attack your good bacteria in the process. And many people just naturally have trouble keeping their teeny tenants in check, which often results in frequent tummy troubles like diarrhea, constipation, bloating—or an uncomfortable combination of the three. That’s where probiotics come in.

MORE: [How to Get IBS Under Control](#)

Probiotics are dietary supplements that consist of living bacteria or yeast to help replenish and re-balance the so-called microflora in your intestines. (They can also be found in dairy products such as yogurt, milk and cheese labeled as containing “active cultures.”) Two common probiotics you might have heard of, *Lactobacillus acidophilus* and *bifidus*, are found naturally in the small and large intestines, respectively, and can be taken regularly to keep the digestive system humming along.

The good bacteria in probiotics also support the immune system, vaginal and urinary health, and have been shown to be helpful for a number of far-ranging issues, including allergies, ulcers, eczema and maybe even high cholesterol.

While they’re great for daily microbial maintenance, you can also take a number of probiotics as-needed, say, right before or right after a meal you just know is going to be trouble later. Just be sure to check labels for proper use.

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from The Gloss

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