

## Why probiotics may or may not help you—and could even harm you

From pickles and candy bars to pills and protein powders, probiotics are touted as a health boon in all flavors of foodstuffs. Consuming these beneficial bacteria can bolster the gut's microbiome, allegedly enhancing everything from digestion to brain function. But regardless of what shape or size these probiotic supplements come in, they appear to have one thing in common—many people simply don't benefit from them, and in some specific cases, they may actually do harm.

A [pair of studies](#) published [September 6] in the journal *Cell* examines probiotic dietary supplements to determine if the supposed wonder bacteria actually provide the kind of benefits that have been claimed. The results paint a more complicated picture.

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Senior author [Eran Elinav, an immunologist at the Weizmann Institute of Science](#) in Israel, and colleagues found that many people's gastrointestinal tracts reject generic probiotics before they can get to work. Even worse, Elinav's team found that microbial competition from off-the-shelf probiotics can prevent natural gut bacteria from reestablishing themselves after being wiped out by antibiotic drugs.

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"[I]t is generally important for everyone to realize that we are unlikely to find simple rules (e.g., take this probiotic for this health issue) that work well across a large diversity of people in a wide range of conditions," [Jonathan Eisen said].

**Read full, original post:** [The Benefits of Probiotics Might Not Be So Clear Cut](#)