Are probiotics a scam, or can they really improve your gut microbiome and health?

To restore the intestinal balance they are sure they do not have, some people turn to probiotics.

But what exactly are probiotics? Do they work? How do you know if you need one? We posed these questions and more to Columbia gastroenterologist Daniel Freedberg, MD, who studies probiotics and their effectiveness.

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The microorganisms in the human gut contribute to nutrition and protect us against illness and disease. A healthy gut has a balanced mix of different bacterial species which promotes immunity.

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The American Gastroenterological Association recommends use of probiotics in three specific situations: (1) to prevent gut infections while taking antibiotics, (2) in preterm infants, and (3) in people with inflammatory bowel disease who have a condition called pouchitis.

Most people who take probiotics do not fall into any of these three categories.

I try to steer my patients away from probiotics for the purpose of improving overall health and toward a fiber-based diet. Fiber acts like a “prebiotic” so it also changes the bacteria that live in the gut.

This is an excerpt. Read the full article here