



THE PERCENTAGE OF COOKIEMAG.COM POLL RESPONDENTS WHO SAY THEY GIVE THEIR KIDS PROBIOTICS. THIRTY-SIX PERCENT SAY THEY DON'T EVEN KNOW WHAT PROBIOTICS ARE.

(dr. mom)

IMMUNE BOOSTERS

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When you consider the many aches and pains probiotics can soothe, it's no wonder the supplements are among the fastest-growing trends in pediatric medicine. Woodson Merrell, M.D., coauthor of *The Source* (Simon & Schuster), explains why you should keep them at the ready. For more information, visit cookiemag.com/probiotics.

PROBIOTICS

WHAT THEY ARE

Probiotics are beneficial bacteria that live in the intestines. Our systems start to absorb them naturally just days after we're born.

"They manufacture nutrients our bodies need—vitamin B12, for example—and can suppress the growth of harmful bacteria that make us ill," says Merrell.

WHAT THEY DO

A basic course of antibiotics can kill off good bacteria with the bad. "Probiotics 'reset' your system and get you back to a healthy state," Merrell says. Probiotic supplements repopulate the natural ecosystem of bacteria already living in our bodies, improving the functioning of the digestive system—where 70 percent of the immune system resides.

WHAT THEY TREAT

Probiotics can help improve irritable-bowel syndrome, diarrhea, constipation, and general digestive issues. Some people opt to ease specific ailments by taking probiotics for a short period; people with chronic problems can take them on a long-term basis.

HOW TO CHOOSE ONE

Ask your doctor before introducing anything new to your or your child's system. In addition to our product suggestions at right, Merrell recommends sites like Medline.com and Pubmed.com to check out research on different strains and brands.

OUR TOP PICKS

- 1 Primal Defense Powder (Kids)**, \$5 for 60 servings, wholefoods.com for stores.
- 2 Vidazorb Belly Boost chewables**, \$44 for 90 tablets, vidazorb.com.
- 3 Rhino chewable FOS & acidophilus**, \$7 for 30 tablets, wholefoods.com for stores.
- 4 Culturelle lactobacillus GG**, \$19 for 30 capsules, vitaminshoppe.com.
- 5 Acidophilus pearls**, \$13 for 30 capsules, enzymatictherapy.com for stores.



TIP To sneak probiotics past kids, stir the powder above into food. Or try Probugs kefir drink (\$6 for four 5-ounce containers) and Applegate Farms probiotic yogurt cheese (\$5 for 12 slices), both available at Whole Foods. Note: Don't cook with these products—refrigeration keeps the good flora alive.