

Lactobacillus acidophilus for diarrhea? ^[1]

Dear Alice,

What is your opinion on Acidophilus for diarrhea?

Answer

Dear Reader,

Lactobacillus acidophilus is bacteria, not the pathogenic type that causes illness, but actually one of several kinds of beneficial bacteria called probiotics. These helpful bacteria are normally found in the intestine and the vagina. They are also naturally available in cultured or fermented dairy products, such as yogurt that contain live active cultures and acidophilus milk. Probiotics are also sold as nutritional supplements. Since the U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA) does not regulate dietary supplements, the presence and/or amount of live active cultures in supplements is not guaranteed.

Probiotics appear to offer various health benefits. They create a more acidic environment in the intestine and vagina, which helps keep harmful bacterial growth in check. This natural balance can be disrupted, however, by antibiotic use and illness. In these cases, the bad bacteria proliferate, usually causing conditions such as diarrhea or vaginal infections. Taking probiotics may help reduce the symptoms of diarrhea and treat vaginal infections.

Other possible benefits include enhancement of the immune system, helping the digestion process, production of antimicrobial substances, and protection against certain chronic illnesses, such as cancer, among other possibilities. However, more research is needed to definitively demonstrate that probiotics have these favorable actions.

To answer your question: There has been some research to suggest that *L. acidophilus* (commonly combined with another probiotic) may reduce the risk and/or duration of some cases of diarrhea if used as a preventative measure. More specifically, a few studies have shown that the use of this probiotic has reduced the risk and incidence of diarrhea associated with antibiotic use and chemotherapy. In another study, a combination of probiotics that included *L. acidophilus* resulted in a shorter duration of acute diarrhea in children. While these findings are promising, there is currently no consensus on whether *L. acidophilus* alone or in combination with

other probiotics would be effective for the prevention or treatment of traveler's diarrhea.

Despite this research, if you are considering using *L. acidophilus* or other probiotics, consult your health care provider before doing so. Those who are pregnant or immune-compromised will need to determine whether or not it's medically safe to take probiotics. Adverse effects include gas and/or bloating, irritation, sensitivities or allergies, and interactions with over-the-counter or prescription drugs and/or other dietary supplements.

There are other remedies for diarrhea, including antidiarrheal and antimicrobial medicines, but these are not recommended in all cases. When the cause is food poisoning, it's best to let the illness run its course. Antidiarrheals can delay the time it takes for food-borne microorganisms to leave the body.

Hope this helps!

Alice!

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