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[Home](#) > Will probiotic-enriched yogurt aid digestion?

Will probiotic-enriched yogurt aid digestion? ^[1]

Dear Alice,

I've been eating the new yogurt Activia and have felt less stomach grumblings since. I switched to just a low-fat yogurt for cost reasons and have had the grumblings come back. Is Activia really better for digestion or is this all in my head?

Answer

Dear Reader,

It's wise to keep a healthy skepticism about the marketing efforts of some of these huge food corporations. Dannon's probiotic-fortified yogurt, Activia, is certainly an example of a highly promoted product. In recent years, the global market for "functional foods ^[2]," has grown to billions of dollars annually, and since these supplement-food hybrids are appearing on the shelves ever more rapidly, the FDA doesn't have a chance to evaluate all of their claims. While there is evidence that probiotics do help to improve digestion and gastronomic health, it is hard to say that one brand over another is more effective at doing so.

Probiotics, beneficial bacteria that live in the small intestine, are believed to improve digestion. These gut-friendly bacteria actually help you to digest and eliminate your food, while crowding out the unhealthy gut-dwelling bacteria that cause gas, constipation, and bloating. Studies have shown that certain probiotics can help relieve irritable bowel syndrome, diarrhea, constipation, atopic eczema, and may also help protect against various infections and colon cancer. Researchers have found that stressed-out rats have benefited from a serving of water containing certain probiotics. Not a flattering comparison for us people, who might feel like stressed-out rats from time to time, but the findings of the study may be helpful. Probiotics are found in many types of fermented foods, like yogurt, sauerkraut, tempeh, and miso.

Regular yogurt is made using these live cultures, and serves up a healthy serving of them with each spoonful. But your question, is Dannon's Activia more effective in providing these results than regular good old-fashioned yogurt, is one that begs a good answer. Dannon (of course) says yes. Their Activia yogurt contains *Bifidus regularis*, a probiotic strain trademarked by Dannon that is not in other yogurts, and they claim that this particular strain speeds wastes through the digestive system and improves immunity in the intestines more effectively than other strains.

Dannon says that their *Bifidus regularis*, "survives passage through the digestive tract, arriving in the colon as a living culture," whereas other cultures can be destroyed by stomach acids and the natural process of digestion. The consumer reports lab has confirmed Dannon's claim, reporting that about three million of the original three billion probiotic organisms in a four-ounce serving of Activia made it through the stomach to the colon.

There is one other difference you mentioned between this yogurt and the others: the price. Activia typically costs more per ounce than regular Dannon yogurt. There are also other brands on the market that offer yogurts containing probiotics that are similar to those in Activia. If you're willing to spoon out the extra cash for yogurts with these particular probiotics and have noticed a decrease in stomach grumbings as a result, it seems like it working for you and might be worth it. However, now that you know that all yogurts contain healthy amounts of probiotics, it might be interesting to see if those regular yogurts feel just as good as the one with all the advertising. Eat up!

Alice!

Category:

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Published date:

May 30, 2008

Last reviewed on:

May 15, 2014

Footer menu

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Links

- [1] <https://goaskalice.columbia.edu/answered-questions/will-probiotic-enriched-yogurt-aid-digestion>
- [2] <http://www.eatright.org/Public/content.aspx?id=6442472528>
- [3] <https://goaskalice.columbia.edu/category/nutrition-physical-activity>
- [4] <https://goaskalice.columbia.edu/answered-questions/enzymes>
- [5] <https://goaskalice.columbia.edu/answered-questions/kombucha-%E2%80%94-diet-supplement>
- [6] <https://goaskalice.columbia.edu/answered-questions/yogurt-yeast-infections>
- [7] <https://goaskalice.columbia.edu/answered-questions/breakfast-ideas-thirteen-year-olds-and-everyone-else>
- [8] <https://goaskalice.columbia.edu/answered-questions/lactobacillus-acidophilus-diarrhea>
- [9] <https://goaskalice.columbia.edu/answered-questions/help-%E2%80%94-my-stomach-rumbles-and-grumbles-no-end>