The Effects of Probiotics on IBS

by EMMI SCOTT

How IBS Probiotics Can Help

If you have irritable bowel syndrome (IBS), you're familiar with the discomfort of gas, bloating, abdominal pain, diarrhea, and constipation. If you experience these issues regularly, you've probably searched high and low for an answer to your problems. Now, some companies are advertising IBS probiotics as a solution to digestive issues, which may feel like a huge relief if you have IBS. But before you start taking a probiotic, it's important to know what they are, what research has been done on them, and the effectiveness of different strains of probiotics on IBS.

Probiotics

Probiotics are live microorganisms that help balance the bacteria in the gut. They reduce inflammation and fight disease-causing bacteria and fungi. Because of this, probiotics are often referred to as "good" bacteria.

You can take probiotics as a supplement in capsule or powdered form. They are also in some food products, such as yogurt and kefir.

Research on Probiotics and IBS

The medical community is not yet certain of the causes of IBS. However, recent research has shown that IBS is likely caused by multiple factors.

These factors include small-bowel bacterial overgrowth, alterations in gut motility, microscopic inflammation, and visceral hypersensitivity. People who have visceral hypersensitivity are more sensitive to pain in the internal organs. The use of probiotics may benefit some of these issues.

Studies on Probiotics

Participants in studies on the effect of probiotics on IBS experienced relief from abdominal pain, bloating, gas, straining, and the frequency of bowel movements.

While the impact of probiotics had varying impacts on participants' symptoms, studies have not found probiotics to do any harm to those who take them.

However, all of these studies were small and had a short duration. Larger and longer studies will need to be done in order to address remaining questions, such as:

- Which probiotic strains are most effective for IBS?
- What dose of probiotics should people with IBS take and for how long?
- Should probiotics be used only for specific IBS symptoms?

- Should people with IBS take probiotics regularly for the long-term or only when their symptoms are bothering them?

Deciding What Strand of Probiotics Is Best for You

If you're ready to start taking a probiotic, there is still a lot to think about. Some strands of probiotics are emerging as more effective in treating IBS than others.

It's also important to consider what digestive issues you want to treat. Different strains of probiotics will help with different IBS symptoms.

Bifidobacterium Infantis

With the research available so far, the *bifidobacterium infantis* (*B. infantis*) strain is supported as the most effective in the treatment of IBS. Study participants with IBS who took *B. infantis* showed an improvement in abdominal pain, bloating, gas, straining, and bowel habit satisfaction.

You can purchase *B. infantis* as a capsule under the name Align Probiotic Supplement.

VSL#3

VSL#3 is a combination of the *bifidobacterium*, *lactobacillus*, and *streptococcus* probiotics. Researchers found that VSL#3 improves bloating, gas, and constipation.

Its effects are weaker than when B. infantis is used on its own, but it may be helpful for those who have IBS with constipation. You can find VSL#3 in capsule form under its own name.

Lactobacillus Plantarum

Studies have shown that lactobacillus plantarum (L. plantarum) improved abdominal pain, bloating, gas, stool frequency, and digestive gurgling in participants. L. plantarum is present in GoodBelly products and in VSL#3.

As researchers continue to study the relationship between probiotics and IBS, we will see if other strains are effective at soothing IBS symptoms.

How to Take Probiotics

Although the studies on probiotics may seem promising, it is always a good idea to consult your doctor before starting a new treatment plan. They may also have more information on what strain is best for you.

Also, people who have weakened immune systems, are receiving treatment for cancer, or have an infection should not take probiotics. In these cases, the probiotics could cause an infection.

While taking a probiotic, keep track of your symptoms using a journal or food log. You should track your symptoms for several weeks, as changes will most likely not happen immediately.

Don't change anything else in your diet when you first start taking a supplement. This will make it easier to see if the probiotic supplement you chose is having a positive impact on your IBS symptoms.

If you notice that your symptoms are getting worse, talk to your doctor about whether you should keep taking the probiotic or try something else.