

Prebiotics

What are they?!

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Prebiotics are a type of non-digestible fibre compound. Prebiotics are substances that are fermented by beneficial, or 'good' bacteria in the gut and help to enhance good gut flora. Probiotics however, are microorganisms. They are living microorganisms and aid in improving gut health and overall well being. Prebiotics can be described as a food for friendly bacteria in the gut - they help to "feed" probiotics and together, they boast an array of health benefits for the digestive tract and overall health.

Prebiotics

Like other high fibre foods, prebiotic compounds pass through the small intestine and remain undigested. Prebiotics are naturally found in foods, but are not broken down by the gastrointestinal tract. Once they pass through the small intestine, they reach the large intestine, where they get fermented by the gut microbes. Prebiotics have numerous health benefits such as improving gut health, enhancing the immune system, lowering inflammation and aiding to reduce symptoms of bowel related issues. The most important function of prebiotics is the ability they have to decrease inflammation of the intestine. By doing so, they aid in supporting a healthy gut environment, which reduces the risk of pathogens (disease/inflammation/illness) to wreak havoc. Research also shows that a healthier gut environment can turn off autoimmune reactions, help the body metabolize nutrients more efficiently and modulate immune functions that control how and where the body stores fats (including in the arteries). Thus, also aiding in reducing the risk of heart disease.

Many diet, lifestyle and environmental factors impact our gut flora. Although prebiotics aren't "destroyed" like probiotics can be, because they must be consumed, there is still an ill effect on their presence when diet and lifestyle choices aren't healthy or optimal. Some common trends that reduce gut flora and prebiotics include a lack of diversity in our food choices. A lack of diversity limits recovery from harmful influences, such as infection or antibiotics. Food provides nutrients to allow bacteria to grow. A diet rich in whole foods will promote growth of different and diverse bacteria. A lack of vegetables will also reduce prebiotics in the gut and can lead to colon inflammation and digestive tract issues.

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What foods are they in?

The best prebiotics come from whole food sources. Food supplies a concentrated amount of prebiotics and are also rich in other minerals and nutrients. Foods that are high in prebiotics include;

Artichokes, radishes, carrots, onions, beetroots, garlic, sweet potatoes, bananas, mangoes and berries. Hemp seeds, pumpkin seeds, chia seeds, quinoa and wild rice are all high in prebiotics too.

How to implement them?

Increasing your consumption of prebiotics can be done in various ways. Apart from adding things like onion and garlic to meals, snacking on foods like raw carrots, flax crackers and cucumbers will help boost intake of prebiotics. Consuming high quality fermented foods, like sauerkraut, kimchi and kombucha are also great ways to increase prebiotic health. Bananas that aren't fully ripe, and are still slightly green, contain resistant starch and prebiotics. Although they may not be as sweet tasting, they can be used in smoothies.

Prebiotic Foods

Veggies

Jerusalem Artichokes
Onions
Asparagus
Garlic
Leeks
Beets
Cabbage
Dandelion Greens
Tomatoes

Fruits

Berries
Bananas
Apples
Mangos

Legumes

Kidney Beans
Navy Beans
White Beans
Black Beans

Grains

Whole Grains
Oatmeal
Chia Seeds
Hemp Seeds
Flax Seeds
Coconut Flour