?Should You Use Probiotics for Constipation



Constipation is a common issue that affects approximately 16% of adults worldwide.

It can be difficult to treat, leading many people to turn to natural remedies and over-the-counter supplements, such as probiotics.

Probiotics are live, beneficial bacteria naturally found in fermented foods, including kombucha, kefir, sauerkraut, and tempeh. They're also sold as supplements.

When consumed, probiotics enhance the gut microbiome — the collection of beneficial bacteria in your digestive tract that helps regulate inflammation, immune function, digestion, and heart health.

Effects on various types of constipation

Probiotics have been studied for their effects on constipation across a wide range of conditions.

Irritable bowel syndrome

Irritable bowel syndrome (IBS) is a digestive disorder that can lead to numerous symptoms, including stomach pain, bloating, and constipation.

Probiotics are often used to aid IBS symptoms, including constipation.

Another study in 150 people with IBS revealed that supplementing with probiotics for 60 days helped improve bowel regularity and stool consistency

Childhood constipation

Constipation in children is common and can be caused by various factors, including diet, family history, food allergies, and psychological issues.

Multiple studies indicate that probiotics relieve constipation in children.

For instance, a review of 6 studies found that taking probiotics for 3–12 weeks increased stool frequency in children with constipation, while a 4-week study in 48 children linked this supplement to improved frequency and consistency of bowel movements.

Pregnancy

Up to 38% of pregnant women experience constipation, which can be caused by prenatal supplements, hormonal fluctuations, or changes in

physical activity

Some research suggests that taking probiotics during pregnancy may prevent constipation.

In another study in 20 women, taking probiotics containing a mix of bacteria strains increased bowel movement frequency and improved constipation symptoms like straining, stomach pain, and the sense of incomplete evacuation.

Medications

Several medications may contribute to constipation, including opioids, iron pills, antidepressants, and certain cancer treatments.

Probiotics may benefit those who experience constipation caused by iron supplements.

For example, a small, 2-week study in 32 women noted that taking a probiotic alongside an iron supplement every day increased bowel regularity and intestinal function, compared with taking a placebo.