

# Probiotics For Dogs

Probiotics are beneficial bacteria that live in the digestive tract. There are a variety of different species belonging to genera that include Lactobacillus, Bifidobacterium, Streptococcus, and Enterococcus (often abbreviated by first initial only in names). Some species, such as Lactobacillus, live primarily in the small intestine, while others, such as Bifidobacteria, reside in the large intestine (colon).

All dogs can benefit from probiotics, which aid digestion and modulate the immune system. Probiotics produce short-chain fatty acids (SCFAs), which inhibit the growth and activity of harmful bacteria, such as E. coli, Salmonella, and Clostridium perfringens, as well as providing other benefits to the intestines. Human studies have documented the effectiveness of certain strains in treating diarrhea, irritable bowel, and intestinal inflammation (fewer studies have been conducted on dogs). Probiotics may help prevent urinary tract infections, and can even reduce allergic reactions by decreasing intestinal permeability and controlling inflammation.

Species with specific strains known to benefit dogs include **Enterococcus faecium** (strain SF68) and **Bacillus coagulans**. **Bifidobacterium animalis** (strain AHC7) has been shown to reduce the time for acute diarrhea to resolve in dogs. Certain strains of **Lactobacillus acidophilus** improve frequency and quality of stools in sensitive dogs. **Lactobacillus rhamnosus** strain GG (LGG) is effective in preventing and treating diarrhea in humans, and may benefit dogs as well. Probiotic products may contain one or several strains.

*Cautions:* Some probiotic species require refrigeration in order to remain viable; follow label recommendations for storage. It's questionable how many survive passage through stomach acid into the digestive tract, and whether they then colonize or must be continually replenished.

Many products, particularly those that are not refrigerated, contain fewer live organisms than their labels claim. Freeze-dried probiotics may last longer than refrigerated or other powdered products, especially if the powder is exposed to moisture (such as when the container is opened and closed). Probiotics in commercial foods may not survive processing or storage. Probiotic products should always provide an expiration date.

Probiotics are measured by colony forming units (CFUs). Few studies have been done to determine effective dosages, but these numbers are usually in the hundreds of millions or higher. If probiotics are being used to help with digestion, they should be taken with meals, but otherwise they may survive better if given between meals, particularly if taken with liquid that helps to dilute stomach acid and move them more quickly into the digestive tract (maybe give them after your dog takes a big drink). Probiotics may be given short-term or long-term.

When using products intended for dogs, follow label suggestions for dosage. When using human products, give the full dosage to dogs weighing 40 pounds or more. Reduce the dosage for smaller dogs or if you see loose stools.