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Evaluation of Probiotics and Their Role in Gut Health

Arti S. Shinde[(1)], Dr. Swati P. Deshmukh [(2)], Mr . Aditya bhise [(3)]

(1) Student, of Shraddha Institute of Pharmacy, Kondala zambre, Washim-444505

(2) Principal, Departments of pharmacology, Shraddha Institute of Pharmacy, Kondala zambre, Washim-444505

(3) Lecturer , Shraddha Institute of Pharmacy, Kondala zambre, Washim- 444505

Abstract

The gastrointestinal tract is a complex and dynamic ecosystem in which the interplay between anatomy, physiology, and microbiota determines digestive efficiency, immune stability, and overall systemic health. Within this environment, probiotics defined as live microorganisms that confer health benefits to the host when administered in adequate amounts play a central role in maintaining microbial equilibrium and intestinal integrity. This review explores the structural and physiological framework of the gut, the mechanisms of probiotic action, and their applications in promoting health and preventing disease.

Probiotics exert multifaceted effects including competitive inhibition of pathogens, production of antimicrobial metabolites, modulation of immune responses, and regulation of host metabolism. Clinically, they have demonstrated benefits in managing gastrointestinal disorders, restoring microbiota following antibiotic use, enhancing nutrient absorption, and influencing neurobehavioral responses through the gut–brain axis. The paper also discusses various dosage forms used for probiotic administration such as capsules, powders, fermented foods, and advanced encapsulated systems highlighting their relative efficacy, stability, and viability. Although probiotics are generally recognized as safe, their effectiveness is highly strain and formulation dependent, emphasizing the need for standardized clinical validation and regulatory consistency.

Overall, probiotics represent a promising approach in functional nutrition and preventive medicine. Future innovations integrating microencapsulation, prebiotics, and next generation microbial strains are expected to optimize targeted delivery and therapeutic outcomes, positioning probiotics as essential components of personalized healthcare.

Keywords

Probiotics; Gut microbiota; Intestinal physiology; Immune modulation; Functional foods; Microencapsulation; Synbiotics; Gut–brain axis; Fermented dairy; Microbial therapy

Introduction

The human digestive system, or gastrointestinal tract, is one of the body's most complicated and ever-changing systems. It does more than just break down and take in food; it also helps control the immune system and keeps the body's internal balance in check [1,2]. Inside the gut, there are trillions of tiny living organisms called the gut microbiota. These microbes play a big role in how the body processes nutrients, protects the lining of the intestines, and communicates with the immune system [3,4]. It's important to keep a healthy balance between the body and these microbes. When this balance is disrupted, a condition called dysbiosis can occur, and it's been linked to issues like digestive diseases, weight gain, metabolic problems, allergies, and even problems with the brain [5,6,7].

Probiotics are live bacteria and yeasts that are good for your health, especially when you eat them in the right amounts, according to the World Health Organization [8].

They help bring back and keep the gut's natural balance. Originally found in foods like yogurt and sauerkraut, probiotics today are made from specific strains that have been tested and proven to be beneficial for people and animals [9,10,11,12,13].In addition to competing with pathogens and generating antimicrobial metabolites like bacteriocins and organic acids, probiotics also strengthen intestinal barriers by improving mucin secretion and tight junction integrity [14,15,16]. By controlling cytokine production, encouraging secretory IgA, and regulating inflammatory responses, they also modify immunity [17,18]. Through short-chain fatty acids (SCFAs), which affect immunological signaling and metabolism, these interactions spread throughout the body [19,20].The relationship between gut microbes and mental health is further highlighted by the gut–brain axis. By controlling neurotransmitters and stress hormones, some "psychobiotic" strains lessen symptoms of depression and anxiety [21,22,23,24]. Probiotics have been clinically shown to reduce Clostridium difficile infections, antibiotic-associated diarrhea, and IBS [25,26,27]. Along with lowering allergy risk—particularly for Lactobacillus and Bifidobacterium strains that reduce the incidence of eczema and food allergies in children [30,31], they also support metabolism by enhancing insulin sensitivity, lipid regulation, and fat metabolism [28,29].Probiotics are produced as fermented foods, tablets, powders, and capsules in the food and pharmaceutical industries. It is still difficult to guarantee microbial survival in gastric conditions, though [32,33,34,35]. Stability and targeted intestinal release are enhanced by methods like microencapsulation, freeze-drying, and delivery based on nanotechnology [36,37,38].Although probiotics are widely used, their effectiveness is dependent on dosage, viability, and strain specificity [39]. Therefore, optimizing therapeutic outcomes requires an understanding of the GI tract's physiology, structure, and microbial interactions. The anatomy and function of the gut, probiotic mechanisms, clinical uses, and formulation techniques for efficient delivery are the main topics of this review [40].

a. Gut Anatomy and Physiology

The gastrointestinal tract is a complex system that helps with digestion, absorbing nutrients, producing substances, and supporting the immune system, all of which are essential for overall health [1]. Structurally, it starts at the mouth and ends at the anus, consisting of several parts like the esophagus, stomach, small intestine, and large intestine. Each part has its own unique structure and function [2,3]. Together, these sections work well with each other to break down food, take in nutrients, manage interactions with bacteria, and keep a balance between the body and the microbes living inside it [4].

b. Structural Organization of the Gastrointestinal Tract

The gastrointestinal tract is structured into four main layers, the mucosa, submucosa, muscularis externa, and serosa [5,6]. The mucosa is the innermost layer, made up of epithelial cells, lamina propria, and muscularis mucosae. Its main job is to absorb nutrients and secrete substances, and it's crucial for keeping harmful microbes from entering the body [7,8]. The submucosa is made of connective tissue, blood vessels, lymphatic vessels, and the submucosal (Meissner's) nerve plexus, which helps control secretion and blood flow [9]. The muscularis externa has two layers of musclecircular and longitudinal that help push food through the intestines with peristaltic movements [10]. The outer layer, called the serosa or adventitia, acts as a protective covering that connects the gut to nearby tissues [11].

C. The Small and Large Intestine

The small intestine is about six to seven meters long and is split into three parts: the duodenum, jejunum, and ileum [12]. It's the main place where food is broken down and nutrients are taken in. The inside has folds, villi, and microvilli, collectively called the brush border, which greatly increases the surface area for absorption [13,14]. There are different types of specialized cells in the small intestine, such as enterocytes for absorbing nutrients, goblet cells that produce mucus, enteroendocrine cells that release hormones, and Paneth cells that secrete antimicrobial peptides [15]. Tight junctions between the epithelial cells help control what can pass through, allowing nutrients to be absorbed while keeping harmful pathogens out [16,17].

The large intestine, which is about 1.5 meters long, is made up of three main parts: the cecum, colon, and rectum [18]. Its main job is to reabsorb water and electrolytes, break down any leftover carbohydrates using gut microbes, and produce short chain fatty acids (SCFAs) [19,20]. The colon has deep pockets called crypts that contain a lot of goblet cells. These cells make mucus, which forms two layers an outer layer that helps support good bacteria and an inner layer that is mostly free of microbes [21,22]. This mucus layer acts as the first defense against harmful bacteria in the gut [23].

d. Physiological Functions

The functioning of the gastrointestinal system combines mechanical, chemical, nerve, and microbial activities. In the stomach, special glands produce hydrochloric acid and pepsinogen, which start breaking down proteins and kill bacteria [24]. The highly acidic environment in the stomach (pH 1.5,3.5) changes the structure of proteins and activates pepsin, while also stopping most of the bacteria you eat from surviving [25]. When the partly digested food, called chyme, enters the duodenum, bile from the liver helps break down fats, and enzymes from the pancreas continue digesting proteins, carbohydrates, and fats [26]. Peristalsis, controlled by the enteric nervous system (ENS), moves food through the intestines smoothly and effectively [27].

In the small intestine, nutrients are absorbed using different transport methods, while the colon mainly recovers water, salts, and helps break down undigested foods [28]. The fermentation of dietary fibers by gut bacteria produces SCFAs like acetate, propionate, and butyrate. These SCFAs provide energy for the cells in the colon and help control how the body uses fats and sugars [29,30]. Butyrate, especially, helps keep the lining of the colon healthy by encouraging new cell growth and keeping the connections between cells strong [31].

e. Gut Associated Lymphoid Tissue and Immune Function

The gut is the body's largest immune organ, containing nearly 70% of all immune cells [32]. The gut associated lymphoid tissue (GALT) includes parts like Peyer's patches, mesenteric lymph nodes, and isolated lymphoid follicles, which are key to mucosal immunity [33]. Specialized cells called microfold (M) cells collect antigens from the gut lumen and pass them to antigen presenting cells such as dendritic cells and macrophages located in the lamina propria [34]. These cells help coordinate immune responses by encouraging the production of immunoglobulin A (IgA) and by activating regulatory T cells (Tregs), which help the body tolerate harmless bacteria and food antigens [35].

Probiotics, which are beneficial microbes, engage closely with this system, boosting IgA production and shifting the balance of immune signals toward a less inflammatory state [36]. When the balance between the immune system and gut microbes is disturbed, it can lead to conditions like inflammatory bowel disease (IBD), irritable bowel syndrome (IBS), and food allergies [37].

f. Gut Microbiota and Functional Ecology

The human gut contains about 10^{14} microorganisms, which is more than ten times the number of human cells in the body [38]. The main groups of bacteria include Firmicutes, Bacteroidetes, Actinobacteria, and Proteobacteria, and together they form a complex ecosystem that affects digestion, metabolism, and immunity [39,40].

Microbial colonization starts at birth and continues to develop during childhood, influenced by factors like the mode of delivery, diet, and exposure to the environment [4,20]. In adults, the gut microbiota reaches a stable state that supports health by blocking harmful pathogens, making important vitamins like K, B12, and folate, and producing substances such as short chain fatty acids (SCFAs) and bile acid derivatives [5,7].

These friendly bacteria also help control the turnover of epithelial cells, maintain mucus production, and influence the immune system through receptors such as Toll like receptors (TLRs) and nucleotide binding oligomerization domain (NOD) receptors [8,15]. These interactions cause controlled inflammation that protects the gut lining without causing harm [24].

When the balance of gut microbes is disrupted known as dysbiosis it is associated with various health problems including obesity, diabetes, colon cancer, and autoimmune diseases [9,38]. Recent research highlights the importance of restoring a healthy microbial balance through dietary changes, prebiotics, and probiotic use [13,17].

g. Neuroendocrine Regulation and Gut–Brain Axis

The enteric nervous system (ENS), often called the "second brain," has more than 100 million neurons inside the gut wall [27]. It controls movement, secretion, and blood flow on its own but also talks back and forth with the central nervous system through the vagus nerve and other nerve pathways [14,28].

Neurotransmitters like serotonin, acetylcholine, and gamma aminobutyric acid (GABA) affect how the intestines move and sense things [29]. Certain probiotic bacteria, such as Lactobacillus rhamnosus and Bifidobacterium longum, can change these signals and help reduce anxiety while improving gut movement [22,23].

This link between the gut microbes, the gut, and the brain shows how gut health affects more than just digestion. It plays a big role in mental health, how the body handles stress, and even behavior [39,40].

i. Integration of Anatomy, Physiology, and Microbiota

The structure and way the gut works create a perfect environment for a good relationship between the body and the microbes living there. The mucus layer and tight connections between the cells form a barrier that keeps harmful bacteria out while letting nutrients in [11,16]. Substances made by the microbes, like butyrate, help keep this barrier strong, control the immune system, and send messages to other parts of the body through both chemical and nerve signals [17,30].

The gut has different parts, like the acidic stomach and the calm colon, which shape where microbes live and how they function. This helps the body digest, take in nutrients, and defend itself in a coordinated way [18,31]. This complex system shows that the gut is not just for digestion but is a key part of the body’s overall health and balance.

2. What is Probiotics

Probiotics are live microorganisms that improve physiological processes and alter gut microbiota to benefit the host's health when given in sufficient quantities [1,2]. Elie Metchnikoff's discovery in the early 1900s that some fermented dairy products increased longevity by encouraging healthy bacterial activity in the intestines served as the inspiration for the idea [3]. From identifying probiotic species to comprehending their molecular mechanisms, immunomodulatory effects, and functions in preventing gastrointestinal and systemic diseases, research has progressed over the years [4,5]. The Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) and the World Health Organization (WHO) define probiotics as "live microorganisms which, when administered in adequate amounts, confer a health benefit on the host" [6].

i. Definition of Probiotics

Probiotics Are Non-pathogenic bacteria and certain yeast species that can colonize the intestine despite the gastrointestinal tract's acidic and enzymatic barriers make up the majority of probiotics [7, 8]. Strain specificity, dosage, and host characteristics like age, nutrition, and health status all affect how well they work [9, 10]. Microorganisms must be of human origin, safe to eat, resistant to bile and stomach acid, able to adhere to intestinal epithelium, and able to provide quantifiable health benefits in order to be categorized as probiotics [11,12]. Lactobacillus, Bifidobacterium, Saccharomyces, Streptococcus, and Bacillus are the most prevalent probiotic genera [13,14,15].

According to recent studies, next generation probiotics like Faecalibacterium prausnitzii and Akkermansia muciniphila may offer specific advantages by producing butyrate and degrading mucin, respectively [16,17,18]. From traditional lactic acid bacteria (LAB) to functional commensals with distinct metabolic and immunoregulatory functions, these bacteria represent a progression in probiotic science [19,20].

2. **Types of Probiotic Bacteria**

Probiotic Bacterial Types According to their genera and modes of action, the main probiotic bacteria can be divided into a number of groups

a) Lactic Acid Bacteria (LAB)

Probiotics from the Lactobacillus and Streptococcus genera are some of the most commonly used in food and medicine. Lactic acid, produced by Lactobacillus rhamnosus, Lactobacillus acidophilus, and Lactobacillus plantarum, lowers intestinal pH and inhibits harmful bacteria like Salmonella and Clostridium difficile [21,22]. They also produce bacteriocins. tiny antimicrobial peptides that prevent the growth of dangerous microorganisms Bifidobacteria [23].

b) Bifidobacteria

Breastfed infants-colon microbiota is dominated by species like Bifidobacterium bifidum, Bifidobacterium longum, and Bifidobacterium breve, which also help maintain gut homeostasis by fermenting oligosaccharides into short chain fatty acids (SCFAs) [24,25]. These SCFAs, in particular acetate, propionate, and butyrate, improve the integrity of the epithelial barrier, influence immunological responses, and provide colonocytes with energy [26, 27].

c) Yeast Probiotics

Probiotics made from yeast A non-pathogenic yeast called Saccharomyces boulardii is known to prevent diarrhea brought on by antibiotics and to restore gut microbiota following dysbiosis [28,29]. It increases the intestinal lumen's secretory IgA production and generates proteases that counteract bacterial toxins [30].

d) Spore Forming Bacteria

Bacteria that Produce Spores Because they are suitable for industrial formulations and have a high resistance to heat and gastric acidity, species such as Bacillus coagulans and Bacillus subtilis have gained importance [31]. They improve immune resilience and digestion by influencing the local microbiota after germinating in the intestine [32].

3. Good vs. Harmful Bacteria

Beneficial versus Dangerous Bacteria More than 100 trillion microorganisms, including both potentially hazardous (pathogenic) and helpful (commensal) bacteria, are found in the human gut [33]. While dysbiosis, or an imbalance favoring pathogens, results in gastrointestinal and metabolic disorders, a balanced microbial community supports digestion, vitamin synthesis, and immune modulation [34, 35].

By battling pathogens for nutrients and adhesion sites, generating antimicrobial compounds, and boosting mucosal immunity, beneficial bacteria like Lactobacillus and Bifidobacterium preserve intestinal homeostasis [36]. On the other hand, if given the opportunity to spread, pathogenic species such as Clostridium difficile and Escherichia coli O157:H7 can cause diarrhea, systemic infections, and inflammation [37].

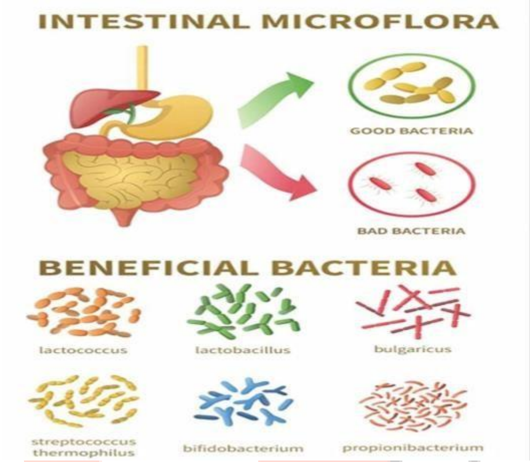

Fig No.1: Internal microflora and beneficial bacteria

Probiotics work by reestablishing the equilibrium between good and bad bacteria. For instance, Bifidobacterium longum and Faecalibacterium prausnitzii reduce inflammation by producing SCFA and modulating cytokines [39, 40], while Lactobacillus reuteri produces reuterin, a broad spectrum antimicrobial compound that suppresses enteric pathogens [38].

4. Natural and Industrial Sources of Probiotics

Probiotics are found naturally in many fermented foods and are also made in factories as supplements.

Natural Sources: Traditional fermented foods like yogurt, kefir, sauerkraut, kimchi, miso, and fermented soy products are rich in lactic acid bacteria [5,28]. Yogurt is the most common food source and usually contains Lactobacillus delbrueckii subsp. bulgaricus and Streptococcus thermophilus. These bacteria work together to turn lactose into lactic acid [10,28]. Other natural sources include kombucha (fermented tea), pickled vegetables, and cultured buttermilk, which contain a variety of bacteria that help support a diverse gut microbiome [29]

Industrial Sources: The food and pharmaceutical industries use advanced techniques like encapsulation and freeze drying to keep probiotics stable during production and storage [8,27]. Probiotics are added to dairy products, baby formulas, and dietary supplements, often in freeze dried forms such as capsules, sachets, or tablets [7,30]. Some types, like Bacillus coagulans, are especially useful in industrial products because they can survive high heat and acidic conditions [31].

5. Uses of Probiotics in Health and Disease Management

Probiotics have many effects on the body, going beyond just supporting gut health to offering benefits throughout the entire system.

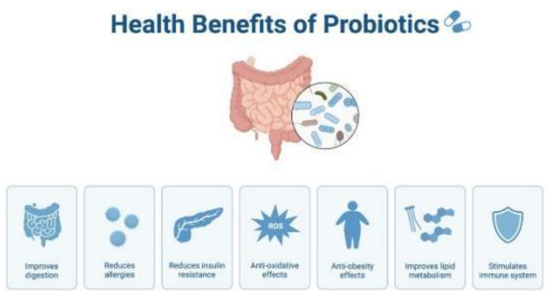

Fig No.2 : health benefits of probiotics

Gastrointestinal Health: Probiotics can help prevent and manage issues like irritable bowel syndrome (IBS), inflammatory bowel disease (IBD), antibiotic related diarrhea, and constipation [12,33]. Certain strains, such as Saccharomyces boulardii and Lactobacillus rhamnosus GG, are especially good at preventing infections caused by Clostridium difficile [28,29].

Immune Modulation: Probiotics support both the body's natural and adaptive immune responses by activating cells like dendritic cells, macrophages, and regulatory T cells [3,17]. They also boost the production of mucosal IgA, which helps protect against harmful gut bacteria [12,19].

Metabolic Regulation: The short chain fatty acids made by probiotics help control how the body processes lipids and glucose, and they also lower overall inflammation, which can improve metabolic health [26,29].

Neurobehavioral Effects: Certain probiotic strains can affect mood and how the body handles stress by changing the levels of brain chemicals like serotonin and GABA, which are linked to feelings and calmness [14,27].

Antimicrobial Resistance (AMR) Mitigation: Some probiotics help reduce the spread of antibiotic resistance by competing with harmful bacteria and improving the body's natural defenses in the gut lining [34,37].

Despite these benefits, probiotics don't work for everyone. The effectiveness can depend on the specific strain used, how the body reacts, and the right dosage [2,8]. Also, people with weak immune systems might face problems like blood infections if the probiotic bacteria move beyond the gut [11]. Because of this, it's important to choose the right strain, use the correct dose, and make sure the probiotics are tested for specific health issues [15,16].

6. Mechanism of Action of Probiotics in the Gut

Probiotics have positive effects on the gut by interacting with the body's gut environment in several ways. They change the balance of bacteria in the gut, help strengthen the lining of the intestinal walls, regulate the immune system, and send signals that affect metabolism [1,2]. These actions work together to keep the gut in balance and stop harmful bacteria from taking over. Understanding how these interactions happen at the biological and molecular level gives important clues about how probiotics can be used for treatment [3,4].

a. Effect of Probiotics in the Gut

The gastrointestinal tract is home to a large number of microorganisms that play a key role in digestion, immune function, and maintaining overall health [5]. Probiotics affect this community by helping to restore a healthy balance of bacteria, blocking the growth of harmful pathogens, and producing useful substances like short chain fatty acids (SCFAs) [6,7]. They also support the gut lining by encouraging the production of mucus and proteins that hold the cells together, which helps reduce the risk of the gut wall becoming too permeable [8]. Research has found that specific strains such as

Lactobacillus rhamnosus GG and Bifidobacterium longum help maintain the strength of the intestinal lining and prevent issues like inflammation related gut weakness [9,10].

In addition, probiotics can lower the acidity in the gut by producing lactic acid, which limits the growth of harmful bacteria such as Salmonella enterica and Escherichia coli [11,12]. These combined effects help keep the gut functioning properly and protect against conditions like inflammatory bowel disease (IBD) and irritable bowel syndrome (IBS) [13,14].

b. **Colonization and Adhesion**

For probiotics to work effectively, they need to stick to the intestines [15]. This sticking helps them stay in the gut, either temporarily or long term, allowing them to interact directly with the body and block harmful bacteria from taking over [16,17]. This sticking is made possible by proteins on the surface of probiotics, like S layer proteins, mucus binding proteins, and lipoteichoic acids, which recognize and attach to mucins in the host [18]. For example, Lactobacillus plantarum and Lactobacillus rhamnosus have special proteins that help them stick to the cells lining the intestines, making them stay longer in the digestive system [19].

Bifidobacterium bifidum attaches itself to the sugar like substances in the mucus layer, helping it establish a friendly presence in the gut [20]. Probiotics can also block harmful bacteria such as Clostridium difficile and Helicobacter pylori from sticking to the gut lining and causing infection [21,22].

Certain bacteria, like Bacillus coagulans, have a different way of colonizing. Their spores can survive the strong acid in the stomach and then grow in the intestines, which helps them stay active and beneficial for a longer time [23]. While most probiotics do not live permanently in the gut, their presence for a short period can change the body's overall health and the types of bacteria present in the gut [24,25].

c. **Antimicrobial Mechanisms**

Probiotics help control harmful bacteria in different ways. They can outcompete bad bacteria for space and nutrients, they can make substances that stop other bacteria from growing, and they can interfere with how bacteria communicate with each other [26]. One of these substances is acidic compounds like lactic, acetic, and propionic acids, which make the gut environment less favorable for harmful bacteria [27].

Many Lactobacillus species also produce bacteriocins, which are small protein like molecules that can kill or stop the growth of harmful bacteria. For instance, Lactobacillus plantarum makes plantaricins, and Lactobacillus reuteri makes reuterin, both of which stop bacteria like Salmonella, Listeria, and Escherichia coli [28,29,30]. Some Bifidobacterium strains make hydrogen peroxide and other substances that further damage harmful bacteria [31].

Probiotics can also stop harmful bacteria from forming sticky films, known as biofilms, by affecting the molecules these bacteria use to communicate [32]. These actions help the body's natural defenses and keep the gut healthy, reducing the chance of infections [33].

d. **Immune Modulation**

One of the most important roles of probiotics is their ability to modulate the immune system. The gut associated lymphoid tissue (GALT) is the main area where microbes and the immune system communicate [34]. Probiotics interact with cells like dendritic cells, macrophages, and intestinal epithelial cells through pattern recognition receptors (PRRs), such as Toll like receptors (TLRs) and nucleotide binding oligomerization domain (NOD) proteins [35,36]. When these interactions happen, they trigger a series of signals that help balance the body's inflammatory responses.

For example, Lactobacillus rhamnosus can lead to the production of interleukin 10 (IL- 10), which helps in forming regulatory T- cells (Tregs) and promotes immune tolerance [37,38]. Similarly, Bifidobacterium longum and Lactobacillus casei can reduce the production of harmful cytokines like TNF α and IL 6, which helps in lowering inflammation in the gut [39,40].

Probiotics also boost the body's mucosal immunity by stimulating the production of secretory immunoglobulin A (sIgA), which helps in neutralizing harmful pathogens and toxins in the gut [3,12]. Furthermore, they play a role in the development of the immune system in babies, which can lower the risk of allergies [4,20].

e. **Metabolic Functions**

The way probiotics break down food can significantly influence the body's health. By fermenting dietary fibers, probiotics create short chain fatty acids (SCFAs) like acetate, propionate, and butyrate, which serve as fuel for the cells in the colon and can affect how genes are expressed by inhibiting histone deacetylase [6,13]. Butyrate helps maintain the integrity of the gut lining and has anti-inflammatory effects by reducing the activity of nuclear factor kappa B (NF κB) [29].

Probiotics also help in processing bile acids, converting primary bile acids into secondary forms, which can affect how the body absorbs fats and manages cholesterol levels [11,31]. Some specific strains like
Lactobacillus plantarum and Bifidobacterium animalis can break down bile salts using bile salt hydrolase (BSH), which helps lower cholesterol in the blood [14,19].

In addition, probiotics can produce important vitamins, especially B complex and vitamin K, which support the body's nutritional needs [23]. The metabolites made by certain bacteria like Akkermansia muciniphila and Faecalibacterium prausnitzii are essential for keeping the gut lining healthy and reducing inflammation related metabolic issues [16,18,35].

f. **Mechanism of Action (Integrated Overview)**

The way probiotics work involves several interconnected processes. First, they must survive the harsh conditions of the stomach and bile to reach the intestines [7,23]. Once there, they stick to the gut lining, compete with harmful bacteria, and release substances that can kill or slow down harmful microbes [17,30]. These actions help restore a healthy balance of gut bacteria (eubiosis) and strengthen the lining of the gut [8,9].

Next, they influence the immune system by encouraging the release of antiinflammatory cytokines and increasing the production of sIgA, which helps protect the gut lining [34,36]. The metabolic byproducts of probiotics, such as SCFAs and bioactive peptides, also affect how the body uses energy, reduces oxidative stress, and keeps the gut in balance [6,26].

Together, the actions of probiotics show a combination of microbial competition, immune regulation, and metabolic support that creates a strong and healthy intestinal environment, which is important for the body's overall well-being [1,2,5,35]. This complex functionality is the basis for their use in treating gut disorders, metabolic conditions, and even affecting brain and behavior through the gut brain connection [14,27,37].

7. Applications of Probiotics

Probiotics have become an important part of both treatment and prevention for keeping the gut and overall body healthy. They work in several ways, like competing with harmful microbes, helping the immune system, and regulating metabolism, which makes them useful in many different areas of medicine and industry [1,2]. The variety of probiotic products available in food, supplements, and medicines has made them easier to get and more useful in real life situations [3].

Applications of Probiotics

a. Digestive Health

One of the most well-known uses of probiotics is supporting the balance of the digestive system. Certain strains, such as Lactobacillus rhamnosus GG and Bifidobacterium bifidum, have been shown to prevent issues like diarrhea from antibiotics, traveler's diarrhea, and infections caused by Clostridium difficile [4,5]. In people with conditions like irritable bowel syndrome (IBS) and inflammatory bowel disease (IBD), probiotics can ease stomach discomfort, improve regularity of bowel movements, and reduce inflammation in the gut lining by affecting immune responses [6–8]. The ability of probiotics to restore a healthy balance of gut bacteria makes them helpful in managing disorders linked to an unhealthy gut environment, such as ulcerative colitis and Crohn’s disease [9,10].

b. Immune Enhancement

Probiotics work with the gut associated lymphoid tissue (GALT) to boost both the body's natural and learned immune responses [11,12]. They help the body make more IgA, a type of antibody that protects the lining of the gut, and they activate dendritic cells, which are like the body's messengers for the immune system. Probiotics also encourage the production of anti-inflammatory substances like IL 10, while reducing harmful inflammation causing chemicals such as TNF α and IL 6 [13,14]. Certain strains like Lactobacillus casei and Bifidobacterium longum help control the activity of T regulatory cells, which play a key role in keeping the immune system balanced [15,16]. Studies show that regular use of probiotics can lower the risk of infections in the respiratory and digestive systems, especially in children and older adults [17,18].

c. Metabolic and Cardiovascular Regulation

Probiotics affect how the body manages metabolism by changing the way it handles bile acids and absorbs fats [19,20]. Some strains like Lactobacillus plantarum and Bifidobacterium animalis help lower cholesterol levels by breaking down bile salts through an enzyme called bile salt hydrolase (BSH). Short chain fatty acids (SCFAs), such as butyrate, also help the body better use insulin and manage blood sugar levels [21,22]. Research indicates that adding Akkermansia muciniphila to the diet can reduce inflammation linked to obesity and improve the body's ability to switch between different energy sources [23,24]. These effects suggest that probiotics can be helpful in managing conditions like metabolic syndrome, diabetes, and obesity [25,26].

d. Neurobehavioral and Gut–Brain Axis Effects

The connection between gut microbiota and the brain is a big area of study when it comes to probiotics. Certain bacteria like Lactobacillus rhamnosus and Bifidobacterium longum help produce brain chemicals such as serotonin and GABA, which can help lower feelings of anxiety and depression [27,28]. These types of probiotics show how gut bacteria can influence brain related signals and help the body handle stress better [29,30]. Research on people who eat fermented dairy products with these bacteria has shown lower stress hormones like cortisol and better overall mood [31].

e. Allergy and Autoimmune Regulation

Probiotics can help reduce allergic reactions by helping the immune system learn to tolerate certain substances and by changing the balance of bacteria in the gut [32]. In babies, adding Bifidobacterium breve and Lactobacillus rhamnosus to their diet has been linked to fewer cases of eczema and food allergies [33]. These bacteria also help keep the immune system balanced by increasing production of IL 10 and maintaining the health of the gut lining, which stops harmful substances from entering the body [34,35].

f. **Industrial and Food Applications**

In the food industry, probiotics are added to products like yogurt, kefir, cheese, and fermented veggies to boost their health benefits [36]. These probiotic based foods are easier to digest, help the body absorb nutrients better, and last longer [37]. Some bacteria, like Bacillus coagulans, are used in special foods because they can survive high heat and acid [38]. In medicine, probiotics are made into pills, powders, and drinks that are easy to take and stay effective for a long time [39,40].

9. Dosage Forms of Probiotics and Their Comparative Effectiveness

The effectiveness of probiotics in a clinical setting depends not just on the type of bacteria used and their ability to stay alive, but also on how they are delivered. An effective probiotic product needs to keep enough live microbes alive through manufacturing, storage, and travel through the digestive system so they can reach the gut and provide health benefits [1,2]. Because of this, improving the way probiotics are delivered has become a key area of study in both the pharmaceutical and supplement industries [3,4].

i. **Dosage Forms of Probiotics**

Probiotics come in many different forms, both as medicine and as food products, each designed to help the bacteria stay alive and work properly in the body. Common forms include capsules, tablets, powders, small packages, liquid mixes, oil based mixtures, and foods that have been fermented [5 7]. Each type has its own advantages and challenges depending on how stable it is, how well the bacteria survive, and how they are released in the body.

a. Capsules and Tablets

Capsules and tablets are some of the most common and trusted ways to deliver probiotics [8]. They are easy to take, ensure the right dose, and protect the probiotics from things like air and moisture [9]. Many probiotic capsules use special coatings, like enteric or microencapsulation, to keep the good bacteria safe from stomach acid and bile, so they reach the intestines in better condition [10,11].

For example, Lactobacillus acidophilus and Bifidobacterium bifidum that are microencapsulated in gelatin or HPMC capsules survive better when passing through the stomach compared to those without protection [12,13].

Similarly, compressed tablets made with freeze dried Lactobacillus rhamnosus keep their effectiveness longer and stay active even in normal conditions [14]. However, the pressure used to make the tablets and the risk of moisture can harm the bacteria if not managed properly during production [15].

b. Powders and Sachets

Powder forms are often used for children and medical purposes because they are easy to mix with liquids and can carry a high number of probiotic bacteria [16]. These powders usually contain freeze dried bacteria mixed with ingredients like skim milk, maltodextrin, or inulin to help them stay active even when dried [17]. Sachets often include multiple types of probiotics, such as Lactobacillus casei,
Bifidobacterium breve, and Streptococcus thermophilus, to work together more effectively [18,19].

Although powders are flexible and useful, they can be affected by changes in humidity and temperature, which might reduce the number of active bacteria over time [20]. To keep them effective for longer, they often need to be stored in the fridge or in a vacuum sealed container [21].

c. Liquid Formulations

Liquid probiotic suspensions, emulsions, and syrups are commonly used for children and elderly people who find it hard to swallow solid tablets [22]. However, keeping the probiotic cells alive in liquid form is difficult because of factors like continuous metabolism, changes in pH levels, and the risk of contamination [23]. To help with this, substances like glycerol or trehalose are often added to preserve the probiotics and make the product last longer [24]. Even with these improvements, liquid probiotics usually don't stay stable as long as dry forms [25].

d. Fermented Foods and Functional Beverages

Traditional food items like yogurt, kefir, kimchi, and fermented soy products are still the most common and popular ways to deliver probiotics [26]. The live bacteria in these foods help maintain a healthy gut environment, and they also help the body break down food more effectively and absorb nutrients better [27]. Dairy based foods, especially yogurt, have a good ability to neutralize stomach acid, which helps the probiotics survive the journey through the digestive system [28,29].

Non-dairy drinks like fermented fruit and vegetable juices are becoming more popular among people who can't tolerate lactose [30]. These drinks often contain bacteria such as Lactobacillus plantarum, Lactobacillus casei, and Bifidobacterium animalis, which can handle acidic environments and stay stable during storage [31,32]. Adding prebiotics to these products, which is called synbiotic formulation, helps the good bacteria grow better and work more effectively [33].].

e. Novel Delivery Systems

In recent years, new technologies have led to the development of advanced ways to deliver probiotics, such as microencapsulation, alginate beads, lipid based carriers, and nanofiber structures [34]. These methods protect the probiotic cells during manufacturing and help them release at the right places in the digestive system [35]. For example, alginate chitosan capsules greatly improve the survival of Lactobacillus reuteri when exposed to the acidic conditions of the stomach [36].

Liposomal and biopolymer based nanocarriers also protect the probiotics from stomach acid and allow them to stick better to the intestinal lining [37]. These next generation delivery methods are expected to solve the problems of poor stability and inconsistent effectiveness that are often seen with traditional probiotic forms [38,39].

ii. **Comparative Effectiveness of Dosage Forms**

The effectiveness of probiotics depends on two main things: the number of live bacteria (called colony forming units or CFUs) and where they reach in the body. The usual effective daily dose is between 10^8 to 10^{11} CFUs per strain, but this can change depending on how the probiotic is made and what condition it's used for [2,5,40]. Studies show that capsules and microencapsulated tablets work best because they have a protective coating that helps the bacteria survive the stomach's acid [10,12].

These encapsulated probiotics keep more than 90% of their bacteria alive after going through stomach acid, while unprotected bacteria in powders or liquids often lose more than half their number [13,14]. Fermented dairy products like yogurt and kefir also work well because the natural components in milk, like proteins and fats, help protect the bacteria. However, the number of CFUs in each serving can change depending on how the product is made and how long it's stored [29].

Powders and sachets are easy to use and flexible for dosing, especially for babies and patients in the hospital. But they need to be mixed properly and stored correctly to keep them effective [16,21]. Liquid forms are good for use right away and for children, but they tend to be less stable and don't last as long [22,25].

New technologies like microencapsulation and nano formulation are changing how probiotics are delivered. These methods make the bacteria more resistant to stress, help them last longer, and improve how well they work in the gut [34–37]. Materials used in encapsulation, such as alginate, chitosan, and lipid membranes, can deliver the bacteria directly to the small intestine or colon, offering better results than older forms [35,38].

iii. **Industrial Considerations and Optimization**

In the pharmaceutical industry, the choice of how to make probiotics depends on the type of bacteria (whether they need air, don't need air, or can form spores), the intended use, and the part of the body they should target [8,23]. Bacteria that form spores, like Bacillus coagulans, are often made into capsules or tablets because they are naturally stable [31,32]. Other types, like Lactobacillus and Bifidobacterium, need extra protection, such as being encapsulated or mixed with dairy products, to stay alive [9,14].

Probiotic products also need to meet strict manufacturing standards called Good Manufacturing Practices (GMP) to ensure that the number of live bacteria stays consistent and that there are no harmful substances [7,39]. Rules also require that the number of live bacteria is clearly labeled at the end of the product's shelf life, so the product remains effective while it's on the market [40].

Conclusion

The gastrointestinal tract is a highly complex and adaptable system where the structure, functions, and microbial communities work together smoothly to maintain health. In this environment, probiotics play a key role by helping to strengthen the intestinal lining, keep the balance of microbes in check, and influence both local and overall immune responses. They help by preventing harmful bacteria from taking hold, producing helpful substances like short chain fatty acids, and supporting the health of the mucosal layer. These actions greatly improve digestion and help the body defend itself against harmful invaders.

Studies have shown that certain probiotic bacteria, like Lactobacillus rhamnosus, Bifidobacterium bifidum, and Saccharomyces boulardii, help improve digestion, stop diarrhea caused by antibiotics, ease symptoms of irritable bowel syndrome, and help the body recover from an imbalance of gut bacteria. These benefits don’t stop at the digestive system. They also affect how the body manages energy and connect the gut to the brain, which can help with mood, reduce stress, and support mental health. These wide ranging effects come from the probiotics’ ability to stick to the gut lining, produce helpful chemicals, and support the immune system.

The effectiveness of probiotic treatments depends on several factors like how they are given, how well they survive, and how stable they are. So far, capsules that protect the probiotics and dairy products that contain live cultures are the best ways to deliver them because they help the good bacteria survive the stomach and reach the intestines. Newer methods, like microencapsulation and using nanocarriers, are being developed to deliver the probiotics more directly and keep them active for longer. Probiotics are a safe, affordable, and natural way to support health and stop diseases. More research is needed to better understand which strains work best, how much to take, and how to make the products more consistent. Combining probiotics with prebiotics and new types of microbes could improve nutrition and help make probiotics an important part of personalized healthcare that focuses on the body’s bacteria.

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