

# Yes, bugs can be good for you

Why you should make healthy bacteria a part of your pregnancy diet

By Kate Geagan, M.S., R.D.

You've no doubt seen the ads toting probiotic-rich yogurt as the secret to regularity for women. But a growing body of research suggests even more reasons a mom-to-be should consider taking supplements of the beneficial bacteria known as probiotics.

The word probiotic literally means "for life." A healthy digestive system contains trillions of these "good bugs" (that's right, *trillions*). They help your body absorb nutrients and synthesize certain vitamins (like vitamin K, important for blood clotting and bone health), as well as fight inflammation and promote immunity (70% of your immune system is in your gut!). A bonus? Probiotics also stall the growth of *Candida albicans*, a major cause of vaginal yeast infections. Tara Gidus, R.D., a nutrition contributor for television's *The Daily Buzz* who's pregnant with her second child, points out that a day-to-day dose of probiotics not only helps soothe the diges-



## Knock back some bacteria

Consuming a few billion bugs in the name of health can be hard to swallow—especially in a culture awash in hand sanitizer and antibacterial soap. But these options are good for you and go down easy.

### Nancy's Organic Cultured Soy Yogurt

This delicious vegan yogurt is good for you and for the planet, since Nancy's supports sustainable agriculture. Each spoonful contains billions of live active cultures (and they make it with cow's milk, too). [nancysyogurt.com](http://nancysyogurt.com)

### GoodBelly Probiotic Fruit Drink

This zingy beverage comes in a blizzard of yummy flavors: Blueberry Açai and Cranberry Watermelon to name two. Dairy-, soy-, and wheat-free, it's packed good bugs and vitamins and minerals. [goodbelly.com](http://goodbelly.com)

tive upsets of pregnancy but also can ward off urinary tract infections, which pregnant women are at higher risk for.

And recent findings are sure to perk up mamas around the globe: taking probiotics each day may help you lose the belly fat after baby. The study, from the University of Turku in Finland, found that women given a combo of *Lactobacillus* and *Bifidobacterium* probiotic cultures during the first trimester had less belly fat and less overall body fat one year after birth than the women who didn't take them. (Of course, good diet and exercise count, too, so think of this as an added plus rather than a silver bullet for your post-baby bod). Beyond the womb, probiotics are a smart addition for new moms, as nursing helps your baby establish his own colony of healthy gut flora, which can set him up for better digestion, promote the immune system, and inhibit harmful bacteria.

In the past five years, probiotics have gone mainstream—no more hitting the health food store to find them. There are lots of choices, from probiotic drinks and supplements to yogurt and other foods (see our picks below). Choose what works for your taste buds as well as your system, since certain cultures often work better for certain stomachs. Consider organic sources to minimize exposure to added hormones, antibiotics, and pesticides. And check with your health-care provider before you start taking probiotics, though they're generally considered a safe, healthy (and tasty!) addition to pregnancy. ●

**Kate Geagan, M.S., R.D.**, is an award-winning dietician in Park City, UT, and author of *Go Green, Get Lean: Trim Your Waistline with the Ultimate Low Carbon Footprint Diet*. She's the mother of two toddlers.



**Stonyfield Organic Probiotic Fat Free Yogurt**

Full of four healthy cultures—*L. acidophilus*, *Bifidus*, *L. casei*, and *L. rhamnosus*—this yogurt comes from an extended family that includes yogurts for babies and toddlers. [stonyfield.com](http://stonyfield.com)

**Culturelle**

Significant research backs this supplement of *Lactobacillus GG*, one of the best cultures at surviving good-bacteria-gobbling stomach acids. Guaranteed 10 billion live bacteria in each capsule. [culturelle.com](http://culturelle.com)

**Old-school sources**

Fermented foods are the traditional way to get good bugs into your gut. If you hate yogurt, maybe you'll love mellow miso or a glass of buttermilk. Try also: sauerkraut, tempeh, kefir, and kimchi.