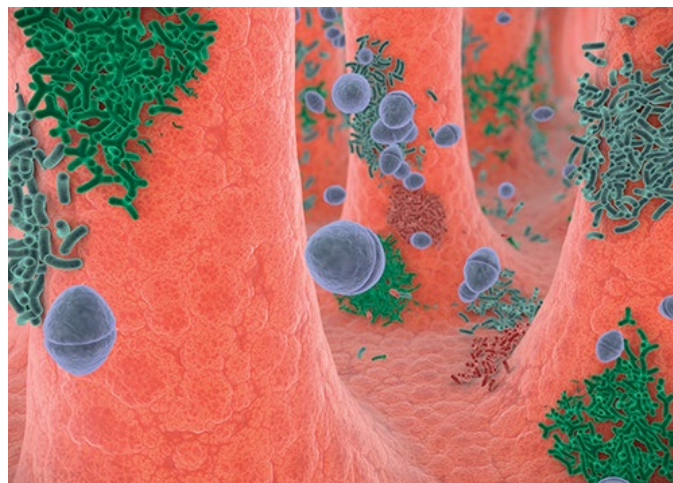




## Understanding Pet Food

# CONSIDERATIONS WHEN CHOOSING A PROBIOTIC SUPPLEMENT

Probiotics are live bacteria that can help – by a variety of mechanisms – maintain a healthy, balanced intestinal microbiota and, therefore, promote good pet health.



Probiotics offer an appealing approach to the management of some gastrointestinal (GI) tract conditions (e.g., diarrhea), to the reduction of anxious behaviors in dogs, and many other potential uses. A substantial part of their appeal is that probiotics offer the opportunity to reduce the use of medications – particularly antibiotics – that could potentially produce adverse effects.

Many probiotic products are available to pet owners, who may not know how to select the most appropriate one for their pets. Veterinary health care teams can play an important role in educating clients and guiding their probiotic supplement choices.

### Key Messages

- Not all probiotics are equal and interchangeable; therefore, it is important to choose a product that has been clinically tested and proven to deliver the desired effect (e.g., supporting immune function, helping manage diarrhea, or addressing anxiety) and that contains what the label says it does.
- Probiotics are strain-specific in their effects. Different strains within the same probiotic species can have different effects.
- A pet must receive an adequate amount of viable probiotic microbes for the product to confer health benefits. However, more is not necessarily better, unless research shows benefits from using a higher dose.

*(continued on next page)*

## Key Messages (continued)

- When selecting a probiotic product, choose one with these core qualities – supported by research in cats and dogs – to provide the greatest benefits:
  - **Proven safety** – Studies must show the probiotic does not become resistant to antibiotics, transmit antibiotic resistance to other microorganisms, or produce pathogenic factors. Since contamination of commercial probiotics can occur, a good probiotic should contain only the organism(s) listed on the label.
  - **Documented stability** – A probiotic should be pure, viable and stable until consumed, and must survive manufacturing, shipping and storage conditions. In addition, manufacturers should guarantee an effective concentration of live probiotic bacteria remains in the product at the end of its shelf life.
  - **Demonstrated efficacy** – Well-designed studies must show the selected probiotic produces beneficial effects for the specific disorder in the target animal species (e.g., chronic diarrhea in cats or anxious behaviors in dogs).
- Other considerations for choosing a probiotic include ease of administration and palatability.

## Additional Resources

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The Purina Institute aims to help put nutrition at the forefront of pet health discussions by providing user-friendly, science-based information that helps pets live longer, healthier lives.