Review Article

BIOMEDICAL Journal of Scientific & Technical Research

ISSN: 2574 -1241

DOI: 10.26717/BJSTR.2026.65.010264

Role of Probiotics in Gut Health and Immunity

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ARTICLE INFO

Received: May 22, 2026

Published: June 15, 2026

Citation: Shaiza Saeed, Dua Ishtiaq, Asma Saghir Khan and Nazish Zulfiqar. Role of Probiotics in Gut Health and Immunity. Biomed J Sci & Tech Res 65(5)-2026. BJSTR. MS.ID.010264.

ABSTRACT

The gut microbiota is the collective name for the trillions of microorganisms that live in the gastrointestinal tract. These organisms are important for digestion, metabolism, nutrient absorption, vitamin synthesis and immune regulation. Probiotics are defined as live microorganisms which when administered in adequate amount confer health benefits to the host and improve the microbial balance of the gut and the host immunity. Research has shown that probiotics can regulate the gut microbiota, improve the integrity of the epithelial barrier, inhibit the growth of pathogenic bacteria, and modulate innate and adaptive immune responses. Probiotics also generate beneficial metabolites such as short-chain fatty acids that promote gut health and immune homeostasis. This research article describes in detail the role of probiotics in gut health and immunity. It covers the interaction of probiotics and gut associated lymphoid tissues, mechanisms of immunomodulation, gastrointestinal disorders, systemic health effects and future applications. The interaction between probiotics and gut associated lymphoid tissues, mechanisms of immunomodulation, gastrointestinal disorders, systemic health effects and future applications of probiotics in medicine and nutrition are discussed. There's scientific evidence about probiotics and their effects on obesity, allergies, skin diseases, mental health and inflammation, the article also notes. The use of probiotics is a promising approach to gut health and improving immunity in general.

Keywords: Gut Microbiota; Dysbiosis; Probiotics; Gastrointestinal Health; Immunity; Lactobacillus; Fermented Foods; Intestinal Homeostasis; Immune Response; Gut Health; Intestinal Barrier; Immune Regulation; Gastrointestinal Disorders; Microbiome; Inflammation; Elie Metchnikoff; Immune System; Cytokine Production; Germ-Free Mice; Inflammation Control; Gastrointestinal Tract; Macrophages; T Cells; B Cells; Intestinal Epithelium; Secretory Immunoglobulin A (SIgA); Short-Chain Fatty Acids; Butyrate; Inflammatory Bowel Disease (IBD); Irritable Bowel Syndrome (IBS); Epithelial Barrier Integrity; Escherichia Coli; Clostridium Difficile; Intestinal Microflora; Tight Junction Proteins; Pathogens Bacteriocins; Organic Acids; Anti-Inflammatory Cytokines; Probiotics Innate Immunity; Adaptive Immunity; Dendritic Cells; Secretory Iga; Cytokines; Autoimmune Disorders; Obesity; Cardiovascular Health; Metabolic Disorders; Gut-Brain Axis; Neuroactive Substances; Atopic Dermatitis; Acne; Allergies; Clinical Applications; Inflammatory Diseases; Animal Nutrition; Dietary Supplements; Personalized; Probiotic Strains; Clinical Trials; Molecular Signaling Pathways; Personalized Treatments; Metagenomic Approaches; Antibiotic Resistance; Drug Delivery Mechanisms; Probiotic-Host Interactions; Personalized

Abbreviations: IBS: Irritable Bowel Syndrome; IBD: Inflammatory Bowel Diseases; sIgA: Secretory Immunoglobulin a; GALT: Gut-associated lymphoid tissue

Introduction

The human gastrointestinal tract is one of the most active microbial ecosystems within the body. It hosts a complex and diverse community of microorganisms including bacteria, fungi, viruses and archaea. These microorganisms together are called the gut microbiota. The gut microbiota has several important physiological functions including the digestion of dietary components, the production of vitamins, the maintenance of intestinal integrity and the protection against harmful pathogens. Diet, lifestyle, antibiotics, stress, environment and disease can all affect the composition of gut microbiota. Dysbiosis is a condition that arises when the balance of intestinal microorganisms is disturbed. Dysbiosis has been linked to inflammatory bowel disease, obesity, diabetes, allergies, autoimmune disorders, infections, and mental health disorders. Probiotics are live microorganisms that, when consumed in adequate quantities, confer a health benefit on the host. The typical probiotic bacteria are Lactobacillus spp., Bifidobacterium spp., Saccharomyces spp., Streptococcus spp., and Enterococcus spp. These microorganisms occur naturally in fermented foods, such as yoghurt, kefir, kimchi, pickles, and fermented milk products. Probiotics have received a lot of scientific attention in recent decades for their positive effects on gut health and immunity. Studies have shown that probiotics can regulate the intestinal microbial composition, improve epithelial barrier function, inhibit pathogenic microorganisms and stimulate immune response. Probiotics communicate with intestinal epithelial cells and immune cells to maintain intestinal homeostasis and improve immune defence mechanisms. Thus, probiotics have been gaining importance as therapeutic agents to maintain gastrointestinal health, prevent infections, reduce inflammation and improve overall well-being.

Literature Review

The concept of probiotics was first put forward by Nobel Prize winner Elie Metchnikoff in the early twentieth century [1]. He noted that people who consumed fermented milk products containing beneficial bacteria seemed to be healthier and lived longer. This observation gave birth to the idea that good microorganisms can have a positive effect on human health. Since then many studies have looked at the role of probiotics in gut health and immunity [2]. Scientific evidence has shown that probiotics help maintain the balance of microbes in the gastrointestinal tract and protect against harmful pathogens. Many experiments in animals and humans have shown that probiotics strengthen the integrity of the intestinal barrier and modulate immune responses. Gut microbiota research on germ-free animals yields strong evidence. Germ-free mice lacking intestinal microorganisms showed poorly developed immune systems, reduced IgA secretion, impaired lymphoid tissues, and increased susceptibility to infections [3]. These studies confirmed the essential role of gut microbiota in immune maturation. Further studies demonstrated that probiotics influence cytokine production, macrophage activation, dendritic cell function, and T-cell responses. Probiotics also promote the production of short-chain fatty acids such as butyrate, acetate, and propionate, which play major roles in epithelial health and inflammation control. Modern research has expanded the understanding of probiotics beyond gastrointestinal disorders [4]. Studies now suggest that probiotics may influence obesity, metabolic diseases, cardiovascular disorders, mental health, skin diseases, and respiratory infections through interactions between the gut microbiota and immune system.

Gut Microbiota and Immune System

There is an interrelationship between gut microbiota and immunity. The intestine has billions of microorganisms which come into contact with immune cells and epithelial membranes. This process is crucial to maintain intestinal balance and protect the body against infections. The gut-associated lymphoid tissue (GALT) has several types of immune cells such as macrophages, dendritic cells, T cells, B cells, plasma cells, and antigen-presenting cells. These immune cells collaborate to detect and remove pathogenic agents while preserving tolerance towards commensal microorganisms. Intestinal epithelium acts as a protective biological barrier separating the external environment from the inner one. Probiotics ensure the function of this membrane through mucus stimulation, tightening tight junction proteins, and decreased intestinal permeability. Another significant element of the immunity of the intestine is secretory immunoglobulin A (sIgA). This step helps preserve mucosal immunity without provoking excessive inflammation. Short-chain fatty acids produced by helpful bacteria are also necessary for proper immunity regulation [5]. Metabolites stimulate the energy metabolism in epithelial cells, decrease inflammation, and promote immune activity. Butyrate is particularly important in maintaining the integrity of epithelial barrier and regulating inflammatory reactions.

Mechanisms of Action of Probiotics

Probiotic functions are associated with several biological pathways. The first biological pathway used by probiotics is the control of the composition of intestinal microflora. Probiotics enhance the presence of beneficial bacteria and inhibit the growth of pathogens. This ensures the diversity and balance of microflora in the intestine. A second pathway involves the enhancement of the intestinal epithelial barrier integrity. Probiotics cause an enhanced production of mucus, which is the main defense against pathogens. Tight junction proteins between epithelial cells are increased to prevent intestinal permeability. Probiotics inhibit the pathogenic organisms by competition. Probiotics compete for resources and niches that could be occupied by pathogenic bacteria. Probiotics inhibit some pathogens by producing substances such as bacteriocins, hydrogen peroxide, and organic acids. The production of organic acids from carbohydrate fermentation leads to a lower intestinal pH. Pathogens cannot survive in such conditions. Pathogens' signaling pathways are blocked by probiotics.

Pathogen colonization is prevented. Probiotics activate the immune system by enhancing macrophages, dendritic cells, T-lymphocytes, and B-lymphocytes. They promote cytokine production and improve the ability of immune cells to communicate with each other [6]. Some probiotics raise levels of anti-inflammatory cytokines like IL-10 and decrease pro-inflammatory cytokines like TNF-α and IL-6. This combination of effects leads to better gut function, enhanced immune response, and prevention of disease.

Role of Probiotics in Gastrointestinal Disorders

There have been various benefits associated with probiotics in different gastrointestinal disorders. One of the common uses of probiotics includes the prevention and management of antibiotic-induced diarrhea. Antibiotics disrupt the microbiota composition in the intestine as they tend to eliminate beneficial bacteria alongside the harmful organisms. Probiotics aid in the reduction of symptoms and improvement of microbe populations. Inflammatory bowel diseases (IBD) are associated with inflammation and dysbiosis in the intestines. Various research works conducted have indicated that probiotics aid in the reduction of inflammatory response, restoration of epithelial barrier integrity, and enhancement of intestinal healing in IBD cases [7]. Irritable Bowel Syndrome (IBS) is one of the common types of gastroenteritis which is associated with symptoms of pain in the abdomen, distention, constipation, and diarrhea. Some of the probiotics have been shown to aid in reducing IBS symptoms through modulation of gut microbiota and suppression of inflammatory response. There are various pathogenic microorganisms, including Escherichia coli and Clostridium difficile which lead to the development of infectious diarrhea. Probiotics suppress the growth of the pathogens and improve intestinal defense systems. Additionally, they assist in the absorption of nutrients in the body and digestive processes.

Role of Probiotics in Immunity

The gastrointestinal tract harbors a significant number of immune cells within the body. Probiotics affect the innate and adaptive immunity through the interaction with the cells lining the gut and other immune tissues. The innate immunity constitutes the body's first line of defense against any pathogens. Probiotics promote macrophage, dendritic cell, and natural killer cell activity for enhanced pathogen elimination. Additionally, they stimulate the synthesis of antimicrobial peptides and cytokines. The adaptive immunity entails antigen-specific immune response through T and B lymphocytes. In this regard, probiotics trigger the synthesis of immunoglobulin, particularly secretory IgA, to provide protection from infections at the mucosal sites. Scientific literature indicates that probiotics modulate inflammation signaling pathways and ensure immune equilibrium. Probiotics help to limit excess inflammatory reactions involved in autoimmune disorders, allergic reactions, and other chronic inflammatory conditions. Furthermore, they could enhance vaccine reactions and reduce the prevalence of respiratory illnesses. Studies have established that probiotic supplementation promotes antibody generation and boosts resistance against viruses.

Probiotics and Systemic Health

Probiotics not only exert positive effects on the GI tract, but also in other bodily organs and systems. According to scientific research, probiotics impact obesity, cardiovascular health, psychological conditions, skin diseases, and metabolic disorders. There is scientific evidence that links obesity with gut microbiome changes and chronic low-grade inflammation. Probiotics are able to maintain microbial equilibrium and prevent inflammation in adipose tissues. Moreover, probiotics are able to increase insulin sensitivity and improve metabolic conditions. Gut-brain axis stands for the link between gut microbiome and central nervous system. Probiotics affect the gut-brain axis through producing neuroactive substances and decreasing inflammation. It was proved that probiotics positively affect the mood, memory processes, stress reaction, and sleep condition. Besides, there are skin conditions which can be caused by gut microbiome dysbiosis, such as atopic dermatitis and acne. Probiotics might decrease skin inflammation and promote better immune tolerance. Furthermore, there is evidence that probiotics are able to prevent hypersensitivity and allergies.

Clinical Applications of Probiotics

There is a variety of clinical applications of probiotics in medicine and nutrition. Probiotics have become extensively employed in the management of various types of gastroenterological problems, infections, and inflammatory diseases. The application of probiotics in animal nutrition has become popular due to their ability to decrease the bacterial load without leading to antibiotic resistance. Probiotic-containing dietary supplements are also applied in clinical practice among humans. Probiotics have been found to improve intestinal barrier functions, reduce inflammation, and strengthen immunity in clinical trials. There are ongoing attempts to test the efficacy of certain probiotics in the prevention of tumors, metabolic diseases, and neuropsychological disorders. Individualized probiotics based on a person's gut microbiome may become one of the trends in the future of medical science.

Challenges and Future Perspectives

Nevertheless, there are many issues associated with the use of probiotics. Probiotic effects depend on the strain type, dosage, diet, genetic background, and environmental factors. Different probiotic strains exhibit varied biological activity. Moreover, not all probiotic microorganisms are able to resist stomach acid and establish themselves in the gut environment. Selecting the right strains and delivery systems is important to receive beneficial results. There is an urgent need for long-term clinical trials to test the safety, effectiveness, and optimal dosages of probiotics. Probiotic-host interactions and molecular signaling pathways in microflora require further study, as well

as personalized treatments based on probiotic supplements. Metagenomic approaches will provide insight into the functioning of gut microbiota. In addition, probiotics can be used as vaccines or drug delivery mechanisms.

Conclusion

Probiotics are crucial for the health of the intestines and boosting the immune system. Probiotics control the microbiota of the gut, increase the integrity of the epithelium, prevent pathogenic bacteria, and affect immune responses. Studies have shown that probiotics have a positive effect on diseases such as gastrointestinal conditions, allergies, inflammation, obesity, metabolic syndromes, and mental disorders. The relationship among probiotics, gut microbiota, and immune cells shows how critical it is to maintain the balance in the intestines for optimal well-being. The future of probiotics will be exciting due to the continued study of probiotics.

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ISSN: 2574-1241

DOI: 10.26717/BJSTR.2026.65.010264

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Submission Link: https://biomedres.us/submit-manuscript.php