

Should You Switch to a Prebiotic or Probiotic Toothpaste?

New toothpastes are aimed at keeping your mouth bacteria balanced. Here's what you should know.

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September 21, 2018

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Photo: Benne Ochs / Getty Images

At this point, it's old news that probiotics have potential health benefits. Chances are you're already eating them, drinking them, taking them, applying them topically, or all of the above. If you want to take it a step further, you can also start brushing your teeth with them. Yep, prebiotic and probiotic toothpaste is a thing. Before you roll your eyes or stock up, keep reading.

When you hear "probiotics," you probably think gut health. That's because the effect that probiotics have on a person's gut bacteria and overall health has been extensively researched. Just like with your gut microbiome, it's beneficial to keep your skin and vaginal microbiomes in balance. Ditto with your mouth. Just like your other microbiomes,

it's home to a variety of bugs. A [recent review](#) pointed out studies that have associated the state of the oral microbiome with overall health. Studies have linked an imbalance of mouth bacteria to oral conditions like cavities and oral cancer, but also to diabetes, immune system diseases, and adverse pregnancies. (Read more: [5 Ways Your Teeth Can Impact Your Health](#)) This suggestion that you should also keep your mouth bacteria in balance has led to the development of prebiotic and probiotic toothpaste.



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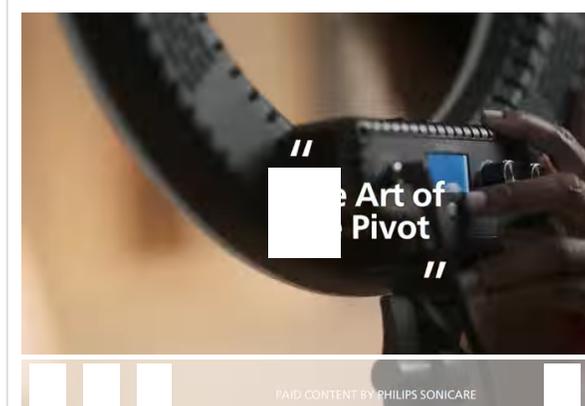
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Let's back up a sec and get a refresher. *Probiotics* are live bacteria that have been linked with various health benefits, and *prebiotics* are nondigestible fibers that [basically act as a fertilizer for probiotics](#). People pop probiotics to promote healthy gut bacteria, so these new toothpastes are meant to serve a similar purpose. When you eat a lot of sugary foods and refined carbs, that's when the bacteria in your mouth take on negative qualities and cause decay. Instead of killing off bacteria like traditional toothpaste, pre- and probiotic toothpastes are aimed at keeping bad bacteria from wreaking havoc. (Related: [You Need to Detox Your Mouth and Teeth-Here's How](#))

"Research has confirmed over and over again that gut bacteria is key to whole-body health, and it's no different for the mouth," says [Steven Freeman, D.D.S.](#), owner of Elite Smiles dentistry and author of [Why Your Teeth Might Be Killing You](#). "Almost all the bacteria in your body is supposed to be there. The problem comes when the bad bacteria basically gets out of control, and their bad properties come to light." So, yes, Freeman recommends switching to a probiotic or prebiotic toothpaste. When you eat sugary foods, the bacteria in the mouth take on negative qualities and can cause both cavities and problems along the gums, he says. But brushing with prebiotic or probiotic toothpaste can prevent these gum issues. An important exception to note: Traditional toothpaste still wins in the cavity-prevention department, says Freeman.

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To make things more complex, probiotic and prebiotic toothpastes work a little differently. Prebiotic is the way to go, says Gerald Curatola, D.D.S., biologic dentist and founder at [Rejuvenation Dentistry](#) and author of [The Mouth Body Connection](#). Curatola actually created the first prebiotic toothpaste, called [Revitin](#). "Probiotics don't work in the mouth because the oral microbiome is very inhospitable for foreign bacteria to set up shop," says Curatola. Prebiotics, on the other hand, can have an effect on your oral microbiome, and "foster balance, nourish, and support a healthy balance of oral bacteria," he says.

Probiotic and prebiotic toothpastes are part of a larger natural toothpaste movement (along with coconut oil and [activated charcoal toothpaste](#)). Plus, people are starting to question some of the ingredients commonly found in traditional toothpaste. Sodium lauryl sulfate, a detergent found in many toothpastes-and enemy number one of the "no shampoo" movement-has raised a red flag. There's also a huge debate surrounding fluoride, which has led many companies to ditch the ingredient in their toothpaste.

Of course, not everyone's on board with the bacteria-brushing trend. No prebiotic or probiotic toothpastes have received the American Dental Association Seal of Acceptance. The association only bestows the seal on toothpastes containing fluoride, and maintains that it's a safe ingredient for [removing plaque and preventing tooth decay](#).

If you decide to make the switch, it's important to brush well, says Freeman. "Fluoride is very good [at] protecting against cavities and freshening your breath, but primarily speaking, when brushing your teeth, it's the actual toothbrush going along your teeth and gums that really goes a long way toward fighting the cavities," he says. So whatever toothpaste you use, there are certain things you should do for the best oral health and smile: Invest in an electric brush, spend a whole two minutes brushing, and position your brush at 45-degree angles toward both sets of gums, he says. Plus, you should continue to get fluoride treatments at the dentist. "That way, it's going directly onto your teeth and there are fewer additives in topically applied fluoride in a dental office than what you're going to find in a tube of toothpaste," says Freeman. Finally, limiting [sugary foods](#) and [carbonated beverages](#) can also make a difference to your overall oral health.

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