

**Ask Dr. OES A Column from the Health and Research Committee (HRC)**

Send questions to [**oeshealth@gmail.com**](mailto:oeshealth@gmail.com)

**Dear Dr. OES,**

**Are Probiotics really beneficial for my dog? If so, what is important in determining which one to give?**

**GI Joe in Poopsville, MT**

Dear GI Joe,

To understand how probiotics can be beneficial, we need to understand the importance of the intestinal microbiota (a community of bacteria, protozoa, viruses, and fungi). Not only does the symbiotic relationship affect digestion and nutrient absorption, it also has an effect on neuroendocrine communication and immune function. Changes in the gut microbiota can affect the dog’s overall health.

In some cases, diarrhea occurs from an overgrowth of bacteria, but in many cases diarrhea is a result of something missing in the gut microbiome. This is why veterinarians will often prescribe probiotics along with antibiotics in hopes of avoiding diarrhea associated with antibiotic use. Unfortunately, the microbiota does not always repopulate after antibiotic use.

Probiotics are live microorganisms that when ingested offer a health benefit to the host. They support the gastrointestinal microbiome. Not all probiotics do the same thing and not all dogs respond the same way to the same probiotic. Healthy dogs have a highly individualized microbiome.

When deciding on which probiotic to use, do some research. Several of the animal companies such as Purina, Visbiome, and Nutramax have canine probiotics. Ask the companies for their data. What studies have they done? Each brand contains a different blend of bacteria that may work better for your dog. Find out what that probiotic claims to do and if the company has proof.

For a probiotic to be effective, it must be alive. The shelf life is important because the amount on the label should be the same amount present at the end of the shelf life.

Dr. OES