

# Probiotics: What's Inside Is Alive

By Andrea Wong, PhD, Senior Vice President, Scientific & Regulatory Affairs, CRN

Consumer interest in probiotics is growing—and so is the body of scientific research supporting their use and revealing the expanding health benefits of these products. Understanding the unique nature of probiotics starts with knowing that these ingredients are actually alive. Probiotics can deliver millions, or sometimes, billions of living organisms and can help the body in a number of ways, including fighting off excessive “bad” bacteria and restoring a healthy microbial balance. More than ever, retail buyers and other retail stakeholders need to understand the intricacies of these living organisms to help make smarter choices about which products to offer customers.

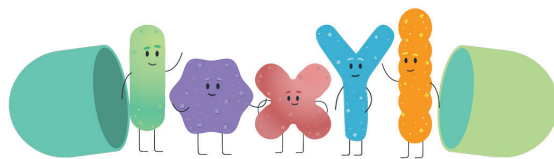
To help ensure retailers have the information they need to improve their overall selection and handling of probiotics, and have the necessary resources to best serve consumers, CRN recently launched an education campaign, “Probiotics: What’s Inside is Alive.” The initiative educates retail buyers and other retail stakeholders on the complexities of probiotics, including their unique nature; wide range of health benefits; proper labeling practices; specific storage and handling requirements; and other necessary resources to support customers.

## Retailers As Gatekeepers

The first phase of the campaign will focus on retail buyers, as they serve as the gatekeepers for what products end up on store shelves. Retail buyers disseminate critical information to safeguard the reputation of their stores and benefit the health of their customers. Knowing how probiotics are different from other dietary supplements will help retail buyers to purchase high-quality probiotic products from responsible manufacturers, curate their product offerings, improve their handling of these products, and educate customers to the benefits of probiotics.

Different probiotic species and strains have unique bioactivities and can provide a wide range of health benefits that affect different systems in the body. For instance, probiotic products contribute to maintaining digestive health, and developing science shows the benefits

## Probiotics: What's Inside is Alive



CRN

certain probiotics can have on immune function, brain health, oral health and bone health, among others. Understanding strain specificity is especially important when retailers discuss probiotic use with consumers. Those retailers who regularly dialogue with consumers should understand the differences in probiotic products offered in their store and know the specific needs of the individual before recommending a product.

## Proper Handling

When it comes to proper probiotic labeling practices and correct storage and handling requirements, it is also critical that retailers ensure that these living organisms remain viable throughout their lifecycle. The initiative addresses three key components included in proper probiotic labeling: identity, quantity and viability. Proper labeling should identify the genus, species and strain for each microorganism in the product; the quantitative amount of probiotics in a product should reflect live cell count, such as colony forming units; and the quantity of probiotics should reflect the amount of live microorganisms at the end of their stated shelf life, not the date of manufacture.

The education program also helps retail buyers understand how probiotics are sensitive to changes in temperature and humidity and how some products require refrigeration, while others are shelf-stable at room temperature. Following accurate storage and handling requirements is vital for the products to maintain the labeled quantity of live organisms through the end of the stated shelf life.

All of this information, and more, is included in the campaign’s educational materials:

- The Retail Buyer’s Guide provides educational materials on the intricacies

of probiotic products, including their unique bioactivity and various health benefits, labeling issues, storage and handling best practices, and consumer usage data.

- The infographic for retail buyers summarizes key aspects of the Buyer’s Guide to help retail buyers easily reference important key points to better understand the overall handling of probiotics.

- The educational video for retail buyers helps this group understand how probiotics are different from other dietary supplements and how to make smart choices about which products to offer their customers through a short explainer video.

Humans rely on these living organisms to interact with their bodily systems and to support a variety health benefits. As probiotics continue to grow in popularity and scientific research continues to demonstrate increased benefits of these products, it is critical for the retailer community to be better informed about the complexities of these living organisms. To learn more about the education program and stay up to date on recently launched educational materials, visit [www.crnusa.org/probiotics](http://www.crnusa.org/probiotics).



Andrea Wong, PhD plays an integral role in CRN’s science and regulatory affairs department, responding to emerging scientific and regulatory issues as well as advocating for science-based nutrition. She also provides scientific expertise in evaluating research relevant to the benefits and safety of ingredients and dietary supplements, and in support of CRN’s nutrition policy activities. Wong leads proactive, self-regulatory initiatives, including the development of best practices guidelines for industry on product labeling and formulation. Prior to joining CRN, she worked as a senior scientific and regulatory consultant for the highly respected consulting firm Intertek Cantox, formerly Cantox Health and Sciences International, in Ontario, Canada.