

# Rising demand for probiotics in SA

The rise of obesity and fast-food consumption has resulted in probiotics dominating the vitamin and dietary supplements market. A Euromonitor report states that the probiotic industry in South Africa is predicted to be worth over R527 million for 2017, confirming that this sector is growing tremendously.



“Over the past two decades, researchers have revealed that an unhealthy gut contributes to a wide range of diseases, including diabetes, obesity, rheumatoid arthritis, autism spectrum disorder, depression and chronic fatigue syndrome,” says Vanessa de Ascencao, nutritional consultant and member of the Health Products Association of South Africa (HPASA).

The South African fast-food industry is valued at over R300 billion, according to South Africa-based market-research company Insight Survey. Therefore, it is hardly surprising that South Africa has the highest overweight and obesity rate in sub-Saharan Africa, with up to 70% of women and a third of men battling with serious weight problems – fast food is generally nutrient poor but high in the kinds of refined carbohydrates and saturated fats that pile on the kilos.

## Good bacteria

Being overweight affects all aspects of health, not least the digestive system, and this has serious implications for immune systems. Probiotics, which are the ‘good’ bacteria that line the digestive tract, assist in nutrient absorption and support the immune system. Found naturally in foods such as yoghurt and pickles, probiotics in the gut can be depleted through poor diet (especially one high in refined sugars) and when taking antibiotics.

“Today, due to our high stress levels, lack of fresh foods and good soil, and the fact that we no longer need to ferment our foods to keep them from going off due to refrigeration and manmade chemicals, most of us have depleted levels of probiotics,” says de Ascencao.

Probiotics also play a useful role in maintaining a healthy weight. “Extensive research has been done over the years, scientifically proving that probiotics play a major role in weight loss,” says Dhivia Naidoo, MD of Compounding Pharmacy of South Africa.

Probiotic supplements can help your body to function at its best, and it is clear that many South Africans are taking this option. Bruce Dennison, president of the HPASA, says that probiotic supplements saw strong growth of 25% in 2016 in South Africa. “Consumers are far more informed about the benefits of supplements and realise the role probiotics can play in improving their health.”

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