

## Maternal perspectives on the use of probiotics in infants: a cross-sectional survey

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### Abstract

**Background:** Probiotic products that may modify the intestinal microbiota are becoming increasingly available and known to consumers due to their potential to prevent or treat many pediatric health conditions. As scientific knowledge of the health benefits of probiotics increases, it is important to identify factors that may prevent their successful integration into patient care as well as to ensure effective translation of research findings. The aim of this study was to describe maternal perspectives on probiotics and their use in infants.

**Methods:** Mothers with a child aged two years or younger enrolled in the Alberta Pregnancy Outcomes and Nutrition (APrON) study were invited by email to complete a 29 item self-administered web-based questionnaire.

**Results:** A total of 413 mothers of the 1327 contacted completed the questionnaire. The majority (99.3%) of respondents had heard of probiotics and were aware that they contained live bacteria (87.0%); 89.3% had used a product containing probiotics themselves but only 50.8% had given one to their infant. Most mothers indicated they believed that probiotics were beneficial (73.1%) and none thought they were harmful. Over a third of mothers did not feel informed enough to make a decision on whether probiotics were safe to use in infants (36.6%).

**Conclusions:** The study demonstrates that awareness and understanding of probiotics is high among mothers in Alberta, Canada. However, there is still uncertainty regarding the benefit of probiotics as well as safety in infants which could be important factors determining therapeutic use in the future. Further studies that demonstrate beneficial effects and safety of probiotics in healthy infants as well as targeted knowledge translation should help to address these potential concerns.

**Keywords:** Probiotics, Infant, Mother, Nutrition, Natural health products, Cross-sectional survey