

Biotic Category Map

Use this quick map when gut-health terms start to blur together.

Category Comparison

Category	Plain-English Meaning	Best Question
Probiotic	A live microorganism studied for a health benefit	Which strain and outcome were studied?
Prebiotic	A substrate selectively used by microbes in a way that may benefit the host	Which ingredient, dose, and tolerance pattern fit?
Synbiotic	A mixture of live microorganisms and substrate that benefits the host	Is this complementary or synergistic, and was the mixture studied?
Postbiotic	A preparation of inanimate microorganisms or components that benefits the host	Which preparation and outcome were studied?
SCFA	A microbial metabolite such as acetate, propionate, or butyrate	Is this explaining a mechanism, not proving a product claim?

Complementary vs Synergistic Synbiotics

Type	What it means	What to ask
Complementary	The probiotic and prebiotic each have their own rationale	Does each component make sense for the goal?
Synergistic	The substrate is selected to be used by the co-administered live microbe	Was the pair tested together for the claimed outcome?

Choose by Your Real Question

- **I need IBS strain help:** probiotic guide.
- **I need fiber or substrate help:** prebiotic fiber guide.
- **I need constipation category help:** constipation synbiotic guide.
- **I need inactivated microbe clarity:** postbiotic guide.
- **I need butyrate or metabolite context:** SCFA guide.
- **I keep reacting to healthy foods or gut-health products:** symptom sorting guide.

Guardrail

More categories on a label do not equal better care. The right gut choice is the one that matches the evidence, the dose, and your symptom pattern.