

Synbiotic Label Checklist

Use this one-page checklist before you buy a product labeled probiotic, prebiotic, or synbiotic.

1. Name the Category

- **Probiotic:** live microorganism with evidence for a health benefit.
- **Prebiotic:** substrate selectively used by host microorganisms with evidence for a health benefit.
- **Synbiotic:** live microorganism plus substrate, with evidence that the mixture benefits the host.
- **Postbiotic:** inanimate microorganism preparation or components with evidence for a health benefit.
- **SCFA:** microbial metabolite such as acetate, propionate, or butyrate.

2. Check the Required Details

Label detail	What to look for
Strain	Species plus strain code, not just a broad genus name
Substrate	Named prebiotic ingredient such as inulin, FOS, GOS, or another substrate
Dose	CFU count or ingredient dose, ideally through the end of shelf life
Outcome	The specific benefit studied, such as stool frequency, IBS symptoms, or diarrhea duration
Population	Whether the study population resembles the person using it
Tolerance	Whether the substrate has triggered gas, fullness, or bloating before

3. Slow Down for These Red Flags

- The label says "complete gut reset" but does not name strains or substrates.
- The product says "synbiotic" but hides the prebiotic ingredient in a blend.
- The copy treats probiotics, prebiotics, postbiotics, and SCFAs as interchangeable.
- The product claims to help every symptom without naming a studied outcome.
- The added prebiotic is inulin, FOS, GOS, or chicory root fiber and you already know those ingredients bother you.

4. Decide the Next Move

- If you need live-microbe evidence, read the probiotic strain guide.
- If you need substrate tolerance help, read the prebiotic fiber guide.
- If bowel frequency is the main issue, read the constipation-specific synbiotic guide.
- If the label is built around inactivated microbes, read the postbiotics guide.
- If symptoms are persistent, severe, or confusing, step back into symptom sorting before buying another product.

Bottom Line

A synbiotic is not automatically better than a probiotic. It is only a better fit when the live microbe, substrate, dose, evidence, and your tolerance all match the goal.