

## Functional Foods and Their Health Benefits with an Emphasis on Probiotics

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**Abstract :** The rise of nutrition-related diseases, increase of health care cost, and the social perception that food could directly affect health have naturally created an environment conducive to the development of foods and beverages with an asserted health benefit. Consumer habits have turned considerably healthier in recent years and led to the demand for fortified and enhanced foods that could adequately provide health benefits beyond necessary nutrients for humans when they are consumed as part of the diet and regularly. These trends have developed a global market for functional foods, that grows annually and undoubtedly requires to be diversified. Product development appears thus as a key research priority for both the food industry and science sectors. The health benefits of these functional foods are summarized in two possible ways: either indirectly as a desired result of biogenic effect or through the direct interaction of ingested live microorganisms with the host (probiotic effect). This paper reviews functional foods and their beneficial health effects with a key focus on probiotics for the possible expansion of their use by the food industry in order to develop non-dairy based probiotics foods. Likewise, it reveals the need for more researches oriented towards an accurate understanding of the possible interaction between probiotic strains and the matrix and, on the other hand, the interaction between probiotic strains and some enzymes used during food manufacturing.

**Keywords :** functional foods, food industry, health benefits, probiotics

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