CLAIMS

What is claimed is:

1. A nutritional composition comprising

a protein source; and

a probiotic selected from the group consisting of *Lactobacillus rhamnosus*, *Bifidobacterium longum* BB536, *Bifidobacterium longum* subsp. *infantis* 35624, *Bifidobacterium animalis* subsp. *lactis* BB-12, or any combination thereof stabilized in a protective matrix, the protective matrix comprising,

a. at least one phospholipid in an amount ranging from 0.5 to 2 grams per 100 grams of the protective matrix, wherein the phospholipid comprises soybean lecithin, egg lecithin, a milk fat derived phospholipid or a combination thereof; and

b. at least one glyceride in an amount ranging from 0.5 to 2 grams per 100 grams of the protective matrix, wherein the glyceride comprises a mono-glyceride or a di-glyceride;

wherein the probiotic is present in an amount ranging from 1×10^9 to 1×10^{11} cfu per gram of the protective matrix.

2. The composition of claim 1, wherein the probiotic comprises viable microbial cells.

3. The composition of claim 1, wherein the matrix further comprises a carbohydrate source.

4. The composition of claim 1, wherein the matrix further comprises pectin.

5. The composition of claim 1, wherein the at least one phospholipid comprises lecithin.

6. The composition of claim 1, wherein the nutritional composition is a powdered infant formula.

7. The composition of claim 1, wherein the nutritional composition further comprises at least one additional lipid component.

8. The composition of claim 1, wherein the nutritional composition further comprises a non-viable probiotic.

9. A method for protecting a viable probiotic for use in a powdered nutritional composition, the method comprising:

a. providing a viable probiotic selected from the group consisting of *Lactobacillus rhamnosus*, *Bifidobacterium longum* BB536, *Bifidobacterium longum* subsp. *infantis* 35624, *Bifidobacterium animalis* subsp. *lactis* BB-12, or any combination thereof;

b. preparing a protective matrix for the probiotic by blending

i. at least one phospholipid in an amount ranging from 0.5 to 2 grams per 100 grams of the protective matrix, wherein the phospholipid comprises soybean lecithin, egg lecithin, a milk fat derived phospholipid or a combination thereof; and

ii. at least one glyceride in an amount ranging from 0.5 to 2 grams per 100 grams of the protective matrix, wherein the glyceride comprises a mono-glyceride or a di-glyceride; and

c. combining the viable probiotic, the protective matrix and water to produce a mixture; and

d. drying the mixture of step (c) to a final moisture content of about 4% or less;

wherein the viable probiotic is present in an amount ranging from 1×10^9 to 1×10^{11} cfu per gram of the protective matrix.

10. The method of claim 9, comprising the additional step of adding the dried mixture of step (d) to a powdered nutritional product.

11. The method of claim 9, comprising the additional step of enclosing the dried mixture of step (d) in a capsule.

12. The method of claim 11, wherein the capsule further comprises an amount of docosahexaenoic acid.