

An Overlooked Food

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In the world of natural food, there is one important class of food that is often overlooked. These are the fermented foods, which act as natural activators and fertilizers, if you will -- providing nutrients and promoting growth of healthy bacteria in your digestive tract.

For ages, humans have used fermented foods to improve intestinal health. In fact, people of Bulgarian and Asian descent are known for their longevity -- and their consumption of fermented foods.

Traditionally fermented foods contain living micro-organisms that replenish the friendly bacteria in your digestive tract.

A few of the foods in this group include:

- Fermented milk
- Natto
- Miso
- Kimchee
- Tempeh
- Kombucha
- Kefir
- Yogurt
- Olives
- Sauerkraut
- Pickles
- Fermented beets

It is important to note that traditionally fermented foods are not the equivalent of the same foods, commercially processed.¹⁰ The only way to insure you're consuming the real thing is to prepare your own fermented foods at home.

Try a Kefir Cocktail

Kefir, which means 'feel good,' is a traditionally fermented food rich in enzymes, beneficial yeast and gut-friendly bacteria. It is similar in consistency to liquid yogurt and when prepared correctly is a refreshing, energizing drink.

Kefir provides all the benefits of a probiotic - and much more.¹¹ It's considered superior therapeutic nutrition, rich in many of the minerals and essential amino acids your body requires for optimum health. And Kefir not only contains strains of friendly bacteria that yogurt does not ~ it also helps to colonize your digestive tract.

Another benefit of Kefir is that all lactose is digested in the culturing process, making it safe even for many who are lactose-intolerant. If you find that you do have trouble digesting the milk Kefir, you can substitute coconut juice.

Kefir is easy to make at home.

Combine Kefir granules with your favorite milk or coconut juice and let the mixture ferment- Both temperature and time play a role in determining the consistency and taste that is most appealing to you. Shoot for a creamy texture - a little thicker than milk.

Refrigerate and drink a toast daily to your good health.

If you don't have the time or interest in experimenting with traditionally fermented foods don't despair. There is an alternative.

Probotic Supplements for life

The word probiotics means 'for life.' The dietary supplement was invented by Elie Metchnikoff, a Russian physiologist and Nobel prize winner. Metchnikoff was the first to suggest that consuming acid-producing live organisms maintained the vitality of your large intestine, leading to a longer and healthier life.¹²

Like those found in traditionally fermented foods, the live micro-organisms in probiotic supplements help to replenish and maintain the friendly bacteria in your intestinal tract. Good bacteria drive down the pH of your gut, which creates an inhospitable environment for bad bacteria. The result is that the good guys flourish and the bad guys are kept in check.

How often should you take a probiotic supplement? Taken daily, probiotics will help ease any current digestive upsets you're experiencing and will also act to maintain the bacterial balance in your gut longer term.

What you should look for in a probiotic supplement:

- No need for refrigeration
- Long shelf life
- Can survive stomach acid so that it reaches your small intestine
- Stays resident in your digestive tract long enough to be effective

From Cradle to Grave

There is mounting evidence that probiotic supplements can be beneficial for everyone -- from infants to the elderly -- for a wide range of symptoms, conditions and diseases.

Probiotics have gained recognition as an effective treatment for diarrhea in children. They have also been used in newborns and infants to repair and support the reliability of their developing digestive systems.

There are a number of health issues specific to women that may also be positively impacted by probiotic supplementation. Among them:

1. Urogenital infections
2. Immune system support during pregnancy and breastfeeding

Around age 60, there is a significant drop in the number of bacteria in our guts.²¹

People over 60 have 1,000 times less friendly bacteria than younger adults. The drop in helpful bacteria increases susceptibility to bowel disorders and infections. Infections may necessitate treatment by antibiotics, which further decimate the good bug count... and you see where this can head.

Clearly, a daily probiotic supplement is an excellent way for older adults to replenish and maintain friendly intestinal bacteria.

Also as you age, your cellular immunity declines. (These are the white cells that are absolutely critical to your ability to fight infection and life-threatening diseases such as cancer.)

A nine-week New Zealand study of seniors 63 to 84 indicated that consumption of the probiotic strain known as *Bifidobacterium lactis* results in increases in both the number and disease-fighting capacity of white cells. And in fact, the greatest improvement was seen in seniors with the worst immune system responses prior to the study.

A supplement for all reasons and all seasons

Dr. Joseph E. Pizzorno, Jr., physician and former member of the White House Commission on Complementary and Alternative Medicine Policy, uses probiotics to treat irritable bowel syndrome, acne, eczema -- even PMS.

Dr. Pizzorno says, "It's unusual for me to see a patient with a chronic disease that doesn't respond to probiotics."

Two things are clear:

1. Sufficient amounts of friendly bacteria are fundamental to your good health. It's impossible to be optimally healthy if your gut's bacterial balance is out of whack.
2. Your lifestyle -- your diet, medications, the antibacterial cleansers you use, and other factors outside your control -- are working together to compromise the number of lifesaving friendly bacteria in your digestive system.

Maintaining a good balance of gut bacteria through diet and regular probiotic supplementation is one of the most important things you can do to increase your chances of remaining healthy and vital for a lifetime.