

Fermented Foods



What is fermentation?

Fermentation is a process that has been used for thousands of years to preserve foods. To ferment a food either the natural bacteria in the food is used, or a culture is added. The bacteria break down the sugars and convert it to lactic acid. Please note that heating fermented food will kill the bacteria.

Why are they recommended?

Fermented foods have a rich diversity of beneficial bacteria, which are known to colonise the large intestine. These bacteria are known as commensal bacteria because we live in harmony with them. These bacteria perform vital tasks for us like breaking down indigestible fibres, controlling yeast growth and production of vitamins. Daily intake of fermented foods may help to prevent digestive imbalances and support immunity.

What are fermented foods?

Yoghurt

A very well-known fermented food is yoghurt. Whilst you can buy 'bio- yoghurt' or 'live' yoghurt, which states on the label that they contain beneficial bacteria, in fact all yoghurt is fermented and will contain beneficial bacteria. Be aware, however, that the more processed a yoghurt the less bacteria it may contain. We recommend sticking to full fat plain yoghurt, plain Greek yoghurt, natural yoghurt, plain live yoghurt or bio yoghurt. Avoid flavoured or low-fat yoghurt as these are usually very high in sugar. It is best to add your own flavouring if required (e.g. a tsp jam or crushed berries).

Kefir

Kefir is a fermented milk drink that is made using kefir grains or kefir cultures. Kefir can be made using dairy milk, coconut milk or water. Kefir has a broader-spectrum of bacteria than yoghurt and is thought to be more beneficial. Kefir is available in most health food shops and even some large supermarkets. Kefir has a slightly sour taste and can be added to smoothies or blended up with berries to improve the flavour if needed. One small glass daily is thought to be beneficial.

Sauerkraut & Kimchi

Sauerkraut is raw fermented white cabbage and as well as the benefits of the bacteria, it also provides fibre. Sauerkraut has a slightly sharp taste and this, in itself, can aid digestion as sharp flavours can stimulate the production of digestive enzymes and bile, which help to break down ingested food. Kimchi is raw fermented vegetables. Sauerkraut and kimchi are available in health food shops and some supermarkets. Ensure that the product you buy is not pasteurised. Some products are actually pickled and not fermented and pickling does not have the same benefits, so read the label carefully.

Kombucha

Kombucha is a fermented tea made from either black or green tea. Kombucha's main health benefits are gut health due to the beneficial bacteria, and immune support as it is a very rich source of antioxidants, known to be cancer-protective. Kombucha is available in some health food shops.

Note: Some veg box companies now stock fermented food. Only small portions are required to gain big benefits!

Homemade fermented foods

It's quicker and easier to buy your fermented foods, however some products can be a little pricey, especially if you have to source them online. You can make fermented foods yourself and once you've done it a few times it's a relatively simple process. The beauty of DIY methods is that you can ferment whatever you want, even homemade condiments such as ketchup and mayonnaise.

If you want to dip your toe into the world of DIY fermentation then it's a good idea to browse Youtube for instructional videos.

We also recommend the following book:

'The Art of Fermentation' by Sandor Ellix Katz. Widely available online.

Who shouldn't have fermented foods?

Theoretically, if you are severely immunocompromised (have a known condition or are taking a medication that severely suppresses your immune system) then fermented foods could cause an overgrowth of bacteria. There are no recorded cases of this however.

If you suffer with histamine intolerance then you should avoid fermented foods.