

Fermented Food



Anna Middleton answers some common questions.

Why do you think fermented foods are important in a raw food diet?

Eating fermented foods help heal our guts and are beneficial whether we favour a predominately raw or cooked food diet. The process of culturing different foods enhances the nutrient content and produces bacteria which are vital for our health. Minerals become more readily available to the body and the bacteria produce both vitamins and enzymes which aid digestion.

Raw vegetables can be incredibly difficult for many people to digest so the inclusion of cultured vegetables are much easier to manage and cause less inflammation to sensitive stomachs. Phytates and lectins are found in most raw grains, legumes, nuts & seeds and they can drastically reduce our body's ability to absorb minerals and long-term consumption can contribute towards negative health effects such as tooth decay. Soaking and fermenting these foods can make them much more digestible. Even though nuts and seeds are packed with nutrients, they are high in phytic acid and also inhibit iron absorption so they are best consumed in moderation and not relied on as a staple in the diet.

Gut bacteria balance intestinal flora, aid in detoxification and help to regulate

weight. Improving our digestive tract with these powerful pro-biotics boosts our immune system which not only impacts our physical health but also benefits our mind as our guts produce serotonin which influence mood and mental health.

What are some of the best foods to ferment?

Home-made cultured foods can vary

in both the nutrients they contain as well as the ease of making them.

Some of the most beneficial fermented foods are cultured fruits and vegetables (such as sauerkraut and kimchi), nut and seed cheeses, kefir and kombucha.

What dishes can you add fermented foods to?

Cultured vegetables are easy to add as a condiment to a wide variety of dishes (both cooked and raw) such as nori wraps, through salads, with curries and stirred into soups.

Fermented nuts can be used to make nut cheeses or added to cakes.

Kefir made from milk (from raw dairy, nut milk or coconut) can be used for smoothies or fermented until the curds and whey separate and then the whey can be used as a starting culture and the curds can be made into cheese or added to desserts.

What is the easiest way to begin?

I would say that cultured vegetables are the best starting point. They are easy and cheap to make, rich in nutrients and taste wonderful. Either a starter culture can be used (such as pro-biotic powder) or you can allow the natural enzymes in the vegetables to ferment once they are submerged in brine.

Spicy Sweet and Sour Kimchi

Ingredients

1 large cabbage (red or white) – finely sliced or grated
Radish or turnip
2-3 carrots
2 or 3 spring onions or shallots
1 apple
Chunk of fresh ginger - grated
2 cloves garlic - crushed
1 chopped chili
2 tsp mineral / rock salt



Method

Massage vegetables until brine is released.
Squash down into glass jar and place cabbage leaf on top - make sure all vegetables are covered in juices.
If there are not enough juices, top up with salty water or celery juice to cover.
Place heavy weight on top of cabbage to make sure vegetables stay submerged under water.
Leave to ferment in warm area for 7-10 days. You can leave it up to 2 weeks if you prefer a stronger and tangy flavour.
Store in fridge (this is now preserved and will keep for months).

Notes

If you want the kimchi to be ready sooner, add 1tsp probiotic powder
Ensure vegetables are under water to prevent mould.

Mineral salt is used to massage the vegetables and release the natural juices. Salt also adds to flavour, acts as a preservative (to prevent the vegetables turning to mush), eliminates and inhibits any pathogenic bacteria or surface mold.

If you don't want to ferment your own food, there are plenty of high quality products available on the market such as sauerkraut, kimchi, miso, seaclear, kefir, kombucha and jun.

Are there any harder things that are worth mastering and why?

Both kefir and kombucha are incredibly healing foods. Both require a starter culture and once they are fermenting, will need more care and attention than fermenting vegetables.

Kombucha is a culture which produces fermented tea that can be incredibly beneficial for digestive disorders, inflammation and joint pain. Some people may find they are sensitive to the sugar and caffeine levels which remain at the end of the fermentation process (the longer the culture ferments, the lower the sugar content will be and the more sour in taste it becomes)

Kefir grains come in 2 varieties - water and milk. They are referred to as grains but are actually colonies of bacteria and yeast and the main difference in the way they look is that dairy kefir

is white and looks like cottage cheese and the water kefir grains are clear.

Water kefir is fermented by adding filtered water or coconut water with a slice of lemon and sugar. Bacteria digest most of the sugar and after around 3 or 4 days, you are left with a sparkling nutritious drink to enjoy. Milk kefir can be made using raw unpasteurised milk, nut or seed milk or coconut. Once fermented, both types of kefir produce drinks high in pro-biotics, digestive enzymes and are full of vitamins. In addition to the benefits from water kefir, milk kefir also contains protein and is mineral-rich.

Dairy kefir grains feed on lactose so if a dairy-free fermented drink is made using coconut or nut milk, every 2 or 3 times it's used the kefir will need to sit in a glass of milk.

Consuming dairy kefir made from goats or cows milk may not appeal to everyone for a variety of reasons and as with all foods, may not work for everyone.

Fermenting raw dairy into kefir provides a highly nutritious food including fat soluble vitamins A, K2 and D3. The process of fermentation breaks down the lactose and sugars and transforms the casein into beneficial peptides, it also rebalances the amino acids in milk making the milk more

suitable for humans to digest. Dairy kefir is best made with A2 milk from Jersey cows as it causes less allergic reactions than A1 milk produced by most cows reared in commercial farming. For more information about raw dairy, see foodforconsciousness.com

Is any equipment needed?

No special equipment is needed. It's easy to get started with a knife, chopping board and a glass kilner jar.

Do you have any special tips?

Fermented foods do not like metal or plastic - use glass or ceramic bowls or jars with wooden spoons for stirring.

Place half a clean eggshell in with water kefir to replenish minerals, especially if using filtered water.

Chlorella or goji berries are great to add to fermented vegetable mixes for a stronger flavour and to boost nutrition.

The best advice is to start with one ferment. There's no need to include all the fermented foods all the time. Listen to your body and find what works for you. It's very common to find that you are drawn to once fermented foods and after a while, your body will let you know it's had enough.

Anna runs courses and classes, see her website for details: annamiddleton.com ❁