



WHY FERMENTED FOODS MATTER



A 90-SECOND BREATHWORK TOOL TO REDUCE STRESS



A SNEAK PEEK AT THE FOOD THERAPIST (PLUS, A RECIPE)



HOW YOUR "FUTURE SELF" CAN HELP KEEP HEALTHY FOOD HABITS ON TRACK

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Why Fermented Foods Matter

Historically, fermented foods played a significant role in our ancestors' diets. And according to registered nutritionist and clean-eating coach, Shira Lenchewski, the food world's recent rediscovery of kimchi, sauerkraut, and even kefir is kind of a big deal. "Nostalgia aside, I'm really hoping this fermentation resurgence sticks because it's actually really good for us." In simple terms, fermentation means that the sugars and carbohydrates in a food have been broken down by beneficial (or "good") bacteria, resulting in the formation of lactic acid, which our taste buds recognize as a complex, pungent burst of flavor. "Fermentation also yields a crucial benefit, far more important than an enhanced flavor profile—a healthy gut." In fact, that might be part of the reason why food allergies (gluten, lactose, etc.) were nowhere near as prevalent in our grandparents' days as they are now. Here, Lenchewski breaks down the basics of gut health, its affects on overall wellbeing, and the far-reaching benefits of fermented foods. (For more on gut health from Dr. Junger, [click here.](#))

Q

Why is gut health so important?

A

In 400 BC, Hippocrates famously said, “All disease begins in the gut.” His words are even more true today than they were then. As the largest mucosal organ of the body, the gut plays a central role in maintaining the immune system. The intestinal lining functions as the bouncer at the door, deciding what’s allowed to pass through into the bloodstream. The characters lobbying for access range from essential nutrients to dangerous pathogens and toxins. And in order for the door to run smoothly, the gut ecosystem must be healthy.

Q

How does gut health affect immunity and intolerances—gluten, specifically?

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The gut lining is a tightly woven net, permeable only to small molecules when healthy. Unfortunately, there are all sorts of factors that can disrupt this delicate lattice, including infections, toxin exposure (mercury, pesticides, and BPA), antibiotic overuse, stress, excess sugar, alcohol, and yes, gluten. When the net becomes irritated (also known as leaky gut), the lining breaks apart, allowing harmful particles to seep through into the bloodstream. The infusion of undigested food particles causes the body to attack them as it would pathogens. Over time, this immune response translates to food allergies and sensitivities. Enter the vague—and frustrating—symptoms, like GI distress, bloating, fatigue, and inflammatory skin conditions...symptoms that are often mistakenly attributed to other ailments.

Ultimately, the integrity of the lining is the most important variable in gut health, and it relies heavily on the type and diversity of beneficial bacteria that reside there.

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Is there a way to reset a damaged gut ecosystem?

A

Resetting your flora is totally possible. The GI tract is one big ecosystem, made up of over 500 diverse bacterial species. But when we talk about beneficial bacteria, we’re typically referring to lactic acid producing bacteria like lactobacillus and bifidobacteria, which you may recognize from oral probiotic labels.

It wasn't until the last decade that we realized 90% of the cells in the human body are microbial. Meaning that we are, in essence, more bacterial than anything else. But if these numbers have you reaching for your hand sanitizer, stand down. The majority of these bugs are fairly neutral, and many are actually working for us.

This is all to say that our intestinal flora have a much bigger impact on overall health than the medical community initially presumed. As we continue to understand the human microbiome better, it appears that we have only scratched the surface of the relationship between our gut and countless maladies: depression, chronic fatigue, obesity, and aging-related diseases among them. There are many researchers (myself included) who believe understanding these broader physiological implications of gut bacteria will be one of the most important medical endeavors of the 21st century. The ultimate goal? Making the GI tract an inviting place for beneficial bacteria to settle down and procreate.

Q

What are cultured vegetables exactly?

A

Fermenting raw vegetables is one of the oldest, most cost-effective means of food preservation around, and it's arguable that we've never needed it more. The process typically starts with shredded or sliced vegetables placed in a low-oxygen container at room temperature. In this environment, the lactobacilli and naturally occurring enzymes multiply, producing a mineral-rich functional food with deep-rooted health benefits. Your best bets: unpasteurized (the pasteurization process kills the live cultures) sauerkraut, kimchi, and fermented greens like daikon and radish greens.

Here are some readily available options:

1. Mother-in-Law Kimchi
2. Probiotic Boost's Spicy Turmeric Kraut
3. Crock & Jar's Pickle Kraut
4. Bio-K (fermented brown rice)
5. Organic Sauerkraut

Q

So what exactly are the benefits of fermented foods?

A

Gut health: When the protective lining of the gut is inflamed, the body is more vulnerable to allergies, infections, and yeast overgrowth. Lucky for us, lactic acid bacteria have the ability to reduce intestinal permeability, thereby restoring the net. They also create pH changes in the GI tract that make it difficult for pathogens to survive. Sayonara, leaky gut.