

Fermented Foods and Gut Health

The human digestive tract contains 100 trillion bacterial cells, often referred to as the gut microbiota.¹ Changes in microbial colonization are thought to be associated with changes in diet, the environment and our genetics. It is believed that modern practices such as sanitation, antibiotic use, cesarean-section birth, formula feeding for infants, and eating foods devoid of live and active cultures may be leading to a poorly functioning intestinal microbiota. This imbalance between “good” bacteria and “bad” bacteria can lead to dysbiosis.² Dysbiosis is thought to contribute to a range of health conditions such as diabetes, obesity, inflammatory bowel disease, irritable bowel syndrome and other gastrointestinal diseases, as well as allergies.³



3 Keys to Health AND a Healthier Gut

1. Eat Fermented Foods – While more research is needed, studies suggest that the consumption of fermented foods may be linked to better health.⁴ However, keep in mind that not all fermented foods are probiotics, and not all probiotics take the form of fermented foods.⁵ Essentially, a probiotic is a live microorganism (typically bacteria) that has been linked to health benefits when used in adequate amounts. Fermented foods *may* contain living cultures that can add beneficial bacteria to the digestive tract.³

Although fermented foods such as aged cheese, kefir (fermented milk drink), sauerkraut, miso, tempeh, wine and beer are made with microorganisms that sometimes remain alive (check the label), they are not called probiotics because their health benefits have not been well defined or supported with adequate research to date. Yogurt can be considered a probiotic food because the traditional cultures, or good bacteria in yogurt, including *Lactobacillus bulgaricus* and *Streptococcus thermophilus* have been well studied for their ability to help with the digestion of lactose, the natural sugar in milk – making yogurt a go-to choice for people with lactose intolerance. Look for brands of yogurt that contain the “live and active cultures” seal on the package, indicating that a significant amount of the good bacteria remain alive after the fermentation process is complete.

2. Eat Prebiotics – Prebiotics are often classified as soluble fiber that the human body cannot digest, but which serve as “food” for the beneficial microbes living in your gut.⁶ For improvements in gut health, it is recommended that we aim for at least 5 grams of prebiotics daily.⁶ Additionally, it is well known that fiber is good for your gut and your overall health – and making sure you consume both soluble and insoluble fiber will help your gut, and help you enjoy valuable prebiotics. Soluble fiber is found in apples, oatmeal, beans, barley and Brussels sprouts, among other foods. Insoluble fiber is found in foods such as wheat bran, nuts, beans, fruits and vegetables. Aim for 25 to 30 grams of fiber per day.

Good for your gut bacteria - Prebiotics	Good for your gut - Fermented Foods
Onions	Yogurt
Tomatoes	Kefir
Asparagus	Coconut kefir
Jerusalem artichokes	Aged cheese
Leeks	Fermented vegetables
Garlic	Sauerkraut
Yams	Kimchi
Bananas	Kombucha
Avocado	Tempeh
Chicory root	Fermented tofu
Inulin	Natto
Prunes	Miso
Dandelion greens	Wheat-free tamari
Barley	Traditional buttermilk
Oats	
Quinoa	



Manuel's Papaya Gut Healing Smoothie recipe:

Serves 1 (yields 2 cups)

- 1 cup papaya, chunks
- 1 cup whole milk (lactose-free if necessary)
- ½ cup 2% Plain Greek Yogurt
- 1 tablespoon lemon juice
- 1 tablespoon honey

Add all ingredients to a blender and blend until smooth. Enjoy!

3. Culinary Applications: Fermented Foods and Probiotics in Action – Perhaps the old English proverb “An apple a day keeps the doctor away” needs to be adjusted to say, “An apple and a yogurt a day keep the doctor away.” After all, eating nutritiously, and including more fermented foods and prebiotics, might be just what the doctor ordered. Try these powerful pairs for improved gut health:

- Apple slices dipped in vanilla Greek yogurt or vegetables paired with a fresh herb yogurt dip
- Overnight oats with kefir and berries
- Manuel's Papaya Gut Healing Smoothie (recipe above)
- Savory quinoa, cucumber yogurt salad
- Sweet or savory roasted yams with Greek yogurt

Sources:

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Manuel Villacorta, M.S., R.D. is a nationally recognized, award winning registered dietitian, spokesperson, and author of several best-selling books. His knowledge, charismatic talent, and his bilingual proficiency in English and Spanish have made him in-demand health and nutrition expert on local and national television, and radio channels. Manuel is the owner of San Francisco-based private practice, MV Nutrition and founder of Whole Body Reboot, an international weight management and wellness program.