The Wellness Family

Dr. Brayton Keeps You Informed

Fermented Foods

Processed and packaged foods are increasingly a major part of the Western Diet. Even foods that are grown (corn, wheat, lettuce, etc.) or raised (beef, pork, chicken, etc.) are no longer what they used to be. Due to pesticides, herbicides and fertilizers, or growth hormones given to livestock, the actual nutritional value in most groceries is compromised.

With this in mind, the family wanting to live the wellness lifestyle and eat healthier must consider where they're purchasing their groceries and, beyond that, how they're being prepared.

What are fermented foods?

Fermentation is a food preservation method that not only changes (some would say improves) the taste of food, but also enhances its nutrient content. Good or healthy bacteria work in the minerals in cultured foods to make them easier to digest, transform them into a beneficial probiotic and increase their nutritional value.

Beneficial bacteria are a vital part of good health and can be found in most fermented foods. These include sauerkraut, kombucha, water kefir, ginger beer, horseradish, yogurt and sour pickles, just to name a few.

How are foods fermented?

The first thing to know is that almost any vegetable and many other food staples can be fermented. From sauerkraut in Germany to kimchi in Korea and many others around the globe, fermented foods have been consumed for years.

The process of lacto-fermentation is one in which natural bacteria feed on the sugar and starch in foods creating lactic acid. This not only preserves the food but creates beneficial enzymes, B-vitamins, Omega-3 fatty acids and various strains of probiotics.

This process will always result in a sour taste since the sugars and carbohydrates have been consumed by the bacteria, resulting in lactic acid and taking away anything that may have provided the food item with a naturally sweet taste.

What are the health benefits?

First and foremost, fermented foods are an excellent and natural source of probiotics. Due to the over-processing of foods, our gut health has suffered from the Western Diet. Probiotics, good or beneficial bacteria, are the healthiest and most natural way to replace missing healthy gut or intestinal flora. Our body maintains a healthy balance between good and bad bacteria during food digestion. Probiotics helps support that balance and improve digestion. In fact, many people have reported back that increasing their fermented food intake has helped with digestive issues such as indigestion, slow digestion, bloating, constipation and diarrhea.

Fermented foods are easier to digest and have an increased nutritional value. Due to new methods of growth and packaging, the foods available in the average grocery store are not even close in quality to what our ancestors were eating. So it only makes sense to take advantage of any opportunity to increase the nutrients available in our foods and then make them easier to absorb by our bodies.

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Can I ferment foods?

USDA microbiologist, Fred Breidt, Jr., says that fermentation is a new movement that is gaining popularity, while Sandor Katz, author of "Wild Fermentation" and the "Art of Fermentation", likens this food movement to a fermentation revival. It has always been a part of human history, making it possible to preserve and store foods before the invention of stoves and refrigerators; it's just now becoming popular again.

If deciding to ferment your own foods at home, be sure to start out with something simple like sauerkraut and then move on to items that are more complicated. Katz points out that many restaurateurs enjoy doing their own fermentation because they can work with the process to create different tastes.

Are they safe?

There are no known cases of people getting ill from properly fermented products, according to Breidt. If following a recipe and monitoring the process, eating foods fermented at home can actually be less risky to your health than eating raw vegetables.

"Lactic acid bacteria are highly efficient killers of other bacteria, and they do a marvelous job," according to Breidt. "This is why vegetable fermentations pretty much always works. It's been working for thousands of years. It's one of the oldest technologies known to man and it always works, and the reason is these lactic acid bacteria are very good at what they do, and we take advantage of that as a technology."

Katz supported this opinion during an interview with Food Safety News calling the process of fermenting raw vegetables at home "intrinsically safe". He listed cabbage, daikon radishes, turnips, parsnips, cucumbers, okra, string beans and green tomatoes as viable options for fermentation. "There's no vegetable you can't ferment," he said, with the warning that dark leafy green vegetables such as kale will typically not be appetizing due to their high chlorophyll content.

So, how do I do it?

The process of fermenting foods is a simple one. Basically, most fermented foods are nothing more than vegetables placed in a brine of salt and water then stored at room temperature for a specific period of time to allow for the development of beneficial bacteria.

These vegetables can be whole, sliced, diced, chopped or grated and certain herbs and spices can even be added to create various tastes. Be sure when choosing to slice, dice, chop or grate the vegetables that they are separated after being placed in the brine to avoid pockets of air. Additionally, they should be completely submerged in order to avoid the risk of mold forming and to ensure that all of the vegetable's flesh is being acted upon by the bacteria.

While some recipes may call for fresh whey as a starter, using salt will have the desired effect. Whey introduces more lactobacillus bacteria right from the beginning but is really not necessary.

Making Sauerkraut

All that is required is 2 medium cabbage heads, 2 tablespoons of sea salt, and time. The first step is to remove the outer leaves getting down to the whiter part of the head. Remove the core, then shred the cabbage and toss it together with the salt in a large mixing bowl. Begin to squeeze the cabbage and salt together, kneading it thoroughly to break up the cellular structure of the shredded cabbage. The cabbage will become limp and begin to release its juice.

Transfer the cabbage into a brining crock. It is not necessary to buy one; a brining crock can be any unchipped enamel pot or large glass jar. A wide-mouth gallon jar (such as a pickle jar) will work well. Pack the salted cabbage into the crock or jar as tightly as possible ensuring the elimination of any air bubbles. It is important to continue packing the cabbage down until it is completely submerged by the liquid resulting from the kneading of the cabbage and the salt.

Loosely cover the opening to the pot or jar and let it sit at room temperature for at least a few weeks or even months. Any scum that appears floating on the surface of the brine can be spooned off. It won't be possible to remove it all but that's not an issue. Test the sauerkraut every few days and when it's finished it can be moved to cold storage or refrigerated.

In Summary

Many consider fermented foods to be an "acquired taste" but, even so, it's a taste that should be acquired. The health benefits make it more than worth it to introduce more than a few of these options into the family diet. It's been said that an apple a day keeps the doctor away, it should be a tablespoon of fermented foods instead.




Dear Patient,
Dr. Brayton is dedicated to providing you with the absolute best in family wellness care. So take a moment today to discuss with your Family Wellness Chiropractor any concerns you may have regarding your family's overall health and wellness.

This newsletter is provided to you by:

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