

Week 4:

Fermented Foods



Aim: Enhance gut and digestive health

The Gist: Add small amounts of fermented foods to your diet

What to expect? Better digestion, better skin, reduction of allergies, inflammation, cravings and better energy

'All disease begins in the gut' - Hippocrates

One of the biggest health issues we face today is declining gut health. Science is continually showing that all diseases start with inflammation, which frequently originates in the gut. Almost any chronic health condition can be linked to poor gut health, and an unhealthy gut can plant the seeds to Alzheimer's, Cancer, Depression, Obesity, Diabetes, or Chronic fatigue. Our digestive tract is central to our body, and affects all systems. We have more nerve cells in our gut than in the entire remainder of our peripheral nervous system.¹

Conditions associated with poor gut health

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|--------------------------------|------------------------|-------------------------------|-------------------------------|
| • Bloating, gas, IBS, diarrhea | • Sleep disturbances | • Mood fluctuations | • Allergies / asthma |
| • Chronic sinusitis | • Auto immune diseases | • Obesity /Metabolic syndrome | • Food intolerance |
| • Immune imbalances | • Hormone imbalances | • Diabetes | • Chronic pain & inflammation |
| • Eczema, psoriasis, rosacea | • Acne | • Autism | • Cancer |
| • Dental cavities | • Gastric ulcers | • Heart disease | • Neurological disorders |

Gut health is commonly taken for granted until something goes wrong. Too many people accept gut specific symptoms like constipation, diarrhea, gas, bloating or heart burn as normal. Even more troublesome are the subsequent complications that occur outside of the gut, which many people have no idea stem from the gut. For example, people with compromised gut health will suffer and treat symptoms like skin issues, chronic pain, cognitive decline, energy and fatigue issues, or mental health conditions like depression, without realising their health issues are originating in the gut.

When our digestive system malfunctions, systemic inflammation and metabolic chaos result, and symptoms can manifest *anywhere* in the body. Consequently, in functional medicine, the gut is one of the first places we investigate due to its fundamental role in wellness.

Creating good gut health is like harvesting healthy, fertile soil for all your other systems to grow strong from. Central to good gut health is our [microbiome](#), the plethora of bacteria that live within our gastrointestinal tract. Our microbiome is located throughout our digestive tract, and is so prolific that it equates to 90% of us! The gut contains over a hundred trillion microorganisms from a 1000 different species. Our microbiome has 150 x the amount of DNA we do, hence we need it to function well!

You are what you eat, and what your gut bacteria digest!

The healthiest guts, have a diverse ecology of bacteria. Many factors can alter our microbiome health, and creating a healthy gut takes more than swallowing a [probiotic or prebiotic](#). This week we aim to actively enhance gastrointestinal function by adding fermented foods.

Why Fermented Foods?

In ancestral societies, fermentation was used as a means of preserving a precious harvest, and increasing the longevity of food. But aside from increasing the shelf life of food, the fermenting process unlocks vitamins, minerals and enzymes, and suppresses harmful anti-nutrient chemicals and naturally cultured a copious amount of probiotic bacteria. Different cultures have been using fermented food for centuries to aid digestion and promote wellness, and the most well known varieties are Saurkraut, Miso, Kombucha, Kim-Chi, Kefir Milk and Kvass.



Fermented foods provide huge amounts of lactic acid bacteria like Lactobacillus, Bifidobacteria and Streptococcus. One cup of kefir contains approximately 2.35 trillion colony-forming units, or CFUs, most probiotic supplements only have a few billion. Fermented foods help to reduce lipid levels, increase antioxidant potential, lower blood pressure and reduce inflammatory molecules.

Fermented foods have several advantages over commercial probiotic products.

- We have evolved to ingest microbes from these and they are potentially more bioavailable
- Probiotic bacteria in foods may be better able to survive the stomach acid
- Fermented foods are cheaper than commercial probiotics
- Higher concentration than supplements
- Increases the bioavailability of B vitamins, magnesium, zinc, and may improve vitamin D status.
- High in dietary prebiotic fiber to assist in long term colonisation of the gut

Start Slow

With probiotics, prebiotics and fermented foods it's **crucial** to start at a very low dose and build up slowly over time! As the good bacteria combat the bad, die off reactions release toxins (Lipopolysaccharides or LPS) that can cause gas, bloating, changes in stool frequency, skin rashes, etc. Once adapted, aim for one to two tablespoons of fermented vegetables with each meal, plus a small cup of kombucha, beet kvass or a half-cup of yogurt or kefir per day.

Restoring an unhealthy gut can take time, and in most cases fermented foods will be a great start to restoring balance. Trickier, more stubborn cases like autoimmune conditions, parasites, [SIBO](#), [stomach acid problems](#) etc may require a more targeted approach. If you experience mild allergy type reactions symptoms when adding in fermented foods, check out this article on [histamine intolerance](#) and reach out to us for guidance.



Tips & Tricks

For the sake of ease this week, we don't recommend making your own fermented foods just yet. The fastest and easiest options will be buying your ferments. Always make sure you buy refrigerated fermented sauerkraut and avoid those that are not. We suggest you head down to your local health food shop and grab a jar of sauerkraut, or kim-chi and a bottle of kombucha or kefir to try. Find which one you prefer and get started **slowly**.

Kefir is a milk based drink that is generally the best tolerated ferment, it's often even tolerated by lactose intolerant people. Kombucha is a naturally fizzy cultured drink made from a living 'mother' and sugar and tea. Sauerkraut and Kim-chi are fermented vegetables, make sure you buy these in ceramic or glass.

While yoghurt is a source of probiotic bacteria, it's often also high in sugar. Store bought pickles are not usually fermented, but can be with longer processing time to create lacto-fermentation. All fermented foods are pickled, but not all pickled foods are fermented.

- Buy the Byron Bay 'Peace Love & Vegetables Sauerkraut, kim chi or kefir at most health food shops. There are other great brands, but this is our fav.
- Grab a bottle of [Remedy Kombucha](#) which is a popular brand of fermented kombucha readily available in many shops.
- Check out [Wild Ferments](#), a local Melbourne woman who runs workshops (Sandringham) on how to make your own ferments.



Further resources

- [Gut Allies – Pre & Probiotics](#)
- [What is Leaky Gut](#)
- [Your Microbiome - The creatures that live in you](#)
- [Could SIBO be the cause of your symptoms?](#)



ⁱ Gerson, MD 1999, The Second Brain, Harper Collins, New York