

The Many Benefits of [and Uses for] Kefir

The many benefits of and uses for **kefir**



Kefir, which means "feel good" in Turkish, is a fermented food popularly advertised as a way to enhance one's health. What gives kefir such a fine reputation, you ask? I was curious, too, so Melissa gave me the exciting opportunity to explore the benefits and uses of kefir, and then share what I learned with you! Let's journey together through the wonderful world of "kefir," shall we?

ok, so... what exactly "is" kefir anyway

It is basically a cultured liquid, **rich with enzymes and friendly micro-organisms**, which aid, not only in digestion but in balancing your entire "inner ecosystem" (or gut-flora). Drink it straight from the container (if you dare) ;-) or use in everyday cooking (or smoothie indulging)!

Fun Facts

- Kefir is **more nutritious than yogurt**. It delivers complete protein, essential minerals and important B vitamins to your body
- You can save money by making it yourself
- **It restores your "inner ecosystem"** after a round of [friendly and non-friendly bacteria killing] antibiotics
- It makes **delicious smoothies** even the kids will love!
- It provides **excellent nourishment** during pregnancy and for nursing mothers
- The friendly bacteria in the kefir culture consumes most of the lactose (milk sugar), which many people find hard to digest, therefore those who struggle with lactose intolerance may tolerate kefir as a feasible alternative
- One cup of kefir is also a **terrific source of protein**, containing 8 to 11g per cup, and provides 10% of the recommended daily value for **Vitamin-A** and 25% of the value for **Vitamin-D**. It is an excellent source of **calcium** as well, amounting to 30% of the recommended daily value per cup, *based on a 2,000-calorie diet*.

Kefir vs. Yogurt

I've heard many people refer to kefir as "liquid yogurt." So, let's take some time to compare kefir to yogurt and see if that is a fair assessment or not.

- Kefir and yogurt are **both fermented milk products** and as such are beneficial to your gut.

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friendly bacteria

- Yogurt: usually contains 1 or 2 strains of bacteria (such as acidophilus and bulgaricus)
- Kefir: made by fermenting milk with 10 to 20 different types of bacteria and yeasts. *According to kefir.net, those strains can include "Lactobacillus Caucasus, Leuconostoc, Acetobacter species, and Streptococcus species"*
- conclusion: **kefir contains three times the amount of probiotic-power** of yogurt.

furthermore

- **Yogurt's beneficial bacteria is short-term** as its main function is to feed the friendly bacteria that already live in your gut. (This helps to keep the digestive system *clean*.)
- **Kefir can actually colonize the intestinal tract!**

It seems there are health benefits to consuming *both* yogurt and kefir, but in a battle between the two on the grounds of nutrition, kefir proves victorious!

Adding kefir to your diet

Maybe you're convinced already that kefir is indeed "good" for you and you're ready to add it into your routine. Are you wondering, "what does this stuff taste like?" Well, in a nutshell, it smells

like and tastes like buttermilk. While many people may enjoy sipping on a tall glass of *buttermilk* in the morning, I do not, and would not. So, I need to find more creative uses for it, like turn it into a smoothie of course!

really simple **Kefir-n-Berries Smoothie**

2 C kefir
2 C frozen berries (I always use strawberries)
1/3 C sucanat (w/honey) crystals*

Add all ingredients to your high-powered blender and blend until smooth, about 30 seconds.

I've never measured out the servings yielded from this combination, but I always share mine between two of my children and myself! ☺

*Are you wondering what **sucanat with honey crystals** are? It is simply a (healthier) alternative to white sugar. I get mine from [quailcovefarms.com](http://www.breadbeckers.com), but I live on the east coast and am able to enjoy that benefit, (I do believe they only deliver locally). I have never seen honey crystals sold in any grocery or health food store (whereas plain sucanat is regularly available these days). However, Bread Beckers sells honey crystals online here:

<http://www.breadbeckers.com/store/pc/Savannah-Gold-Free-Flowing-Honey-Crystals-Cane-Sugar-Honey-5-lb-Pail-p2488.htm>

FYI: I substitute (1:1) honey crystals in (almost) every recipe that calls for white sugar (the brown sucanat I

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reserve as a substitute for brown sugar). I have never tried this smoothie with ordinary sucanat or by simply using honey, so I can't vouch for substituting it with either of those.

NOTE: Kefir also comes in various flavors at the supermarket, I prefer the consistency of my own smoothies, though, and so do my kids. To learn more about these products visit lifeway.net. *Watch out for the added sugars/calories found in the already prepared flavored-kefirs. Plain kefir alone has 12g of sugars in one cup, the strawberry kefir, increases that number to 20g.*

Making your own kefir

Are you a DIY-er? I'm not, so I am utterly unable to declare the validity of the claim that making your own kefir is **easy to do**. Let's explore the possibility though! Maybe I'll change my mind.

Here's what you will need to make one quart of kefir:

- Fresh milk (organic whole milk is best, if possible *not ultra-pasteurized*, you can also use goat's milk, or coconut milk)
- Kefir grains (not the powder)
- A quart-sized glass jar (with lid or paper coffee filter with rubber band)
- Wooden spoon*
- A plastic strainer*

*The acidity of the Kefir grains make them prone to react with kitchen implements made from aluminum, iron, brass or copper. So, use a wooden spoon if possible and a plastic strainer (stainless steel is okay, too).

Where to get a starter kit:

Cultures for Health has a good quality kefir grain starter kit and also a handy video to watch, which is sure to get your started on the right track!
<http://www.culturesforhealth.com/milk-kefir-starter-kit.html>

Step One

You'll want to make sure your glass jar and its lid are both very clean (if you want to be extra careful, boil the jar and lid for several minutes and let cool completely). Place the kefir grains in the jar first, then pour the milk over them.

Typical grain to milk ratio is: 3 tablespoons of kefir grains for every quart (or liter) of milk.

Gently stir the mixture and close jar (loosely) with lid. *Leaving the lid slightly loose allows excess pressure the ability to escape.* Or use a paper coffee filter secured with rubber band.

Step Two

Keep the jar at a warm place in your house (generally between 70 and 78 degrees) and out of

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direct sunlight. The fermentation process can take anywhere from 12 hours to 48 hours, depending on how strong you like your kefir.

Rule of thumb: Less time in the jar = a sweeter, thinner kefir (with the consistency of buttermilk), whereas a longer fermentation = a thicker, more sour kefir (and may result in a more “curds and whey” texture). *While it is still OK to consume at this stage, please note that it will be quite sour.*

Step Three

Give the jar a quick stir and then pour contents through the strainer. *You may need to “help” it through the strainer by gently stirring with your wooden spoon.* This separates the liquid from the grains. Store the liquid in the refrigerator, or at room temperature for a few days. (Storing it at room temperature for a day or two will help it ripen, increasing the nutritional content and allowing most of the lactose to be fermented away).

Don't throw the grains away! You can use them again (and again and again). *Place them in a bowl with a small amount of milk and store them in the fridge if you do not plan to make another batch right away.*

Wow, that does sound easy! So easy in fact, that I literally just ordered a starter kit and plan to give it a try, I hope it's inspired you to try it, too! 😊

Shelf life and Where to Find Recipes

Unlike plain milk and other dairy products, there's no rush to consume store-bought kefir, just check the expiration date on the bottle and consume it before then (even after opening the container). However, if you make it yourself, I've read it should be used within two weeks.

Use kefir in beverages, condiments, baked goods, salads, desserts, soups, and more! I usually substitute kefir when a recipe (such as pancakes or waffles) calls for buttermilk.

You can find many interesting kefir recipes here:
<http://www.culturesforhealth.com/milk-kefir-recipes>

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