



# Healthy You

## Good for Your Gut?

Your belly microbes are hungry. Here's what will, and won't, make them happy

By KELSEY OGLETREE



### Yogurt and kefir

★★★★

**Good.** as long as you're not lactose intolerant. Look for kefirs and yogurts containing live, active cultures such as bifidobacteria and lactobacillus, which have been shown to boost gut health and lessen symptoms of IBS.

#### WHAT TO LOOK FOR

Avoid products with additives like emulsifiers (soy lecithin, carrageenan), which can decrease the diversity of healthy gut bacteria. Choose options with little to no added sugar, which can negate the beneficial effects.

### Fiber supplements

★★★★

**Good.** If you already get 22 grams of fiber daily (for women; 28 grams for men), there's no need for a supplement. But most of us struggle to get enough fiber through food, in which case supplements can help.

#### WHAT TO LOOK FOR

It's better to get fiber from foods (vegetables, whole grains, fruits, nuts, legumes). Talk with your doctor before starting supplementation, and avoid supplements with artificial sweeteners, sugar or other additives.

### Sauerkraut and kimchi

★★★★★

**Excellent.** Fermented foods, such as sauerkraut and kimchi, increase the diversity of your microbiome and decrease inflammatory proteins linked to conditions that include rheumatoid arthritis and type 2 diabetes.

#### WHAT TO LOOK FOR

Shop for products that are labeled as lacto-fermented and unpasteurized, and kept in the refrigerator section. Examine the jar first: You should be able to see bubbles in the liquid, which is a sign the food is fermented.

### Kombucha

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**Questionable.** There's little research showing this sweet tea is good for your gut. And most kombucha comes with enough added sugar to negatively impact any gut-friendly probiotic benefits of the drink.

#### WHAT TO LOOK FOR

Sugar is necessary for the fermentation process, but seek out the brand with the lowest amount, says Megan Hilbert, a registered dietitian nutritionist in Madison, Wisconsin, who specializes in gut health.

### Probiotic supplements

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**Questionable.** Probiotic supplements are not FDA regulated, meaning a product may not contain what's listed on the label, says Ali Rezaie, M.D., medical director of the GI Motility Program at Cedars-Sinai in Los Angeles.

#### WHAT TO LOOK FOR

Ask your doctor whether probiotics make sense for you, and for a recommendation for a reputable brand that's had its contents verified by a third party.

*Kelsey Ogletree writes on health and food for numerous magazines.*