

THE TEA OF IMMORTALITY

Kombucha's Health Benefits and How to Make It

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Kombucha has risen to popularity of late, especially given its science-backed claims that it's beneficial to health, from improving digestion, boosting metabolism which helps one lose weight, strengthening immunity and liver function.

#WHAT IS KOMBUCHA?

Firstly, the question beckons — what is kombucha? Kombucha is a fermented beverage derived from amalgamating green or black tea (or both), sugar, yeast and bacteria, and is believed to have originated in China approximately 2,000 years ago. It is made by adding a colony of live bacteria and yeast, known as SCOBY (symbiotic culture of bacteria and yeast) and this is left to ferment for a couple of weeks until it turns into a balance of sweet and tart drink that's separated from the SCOBY and bottled.

#WHAT DOES KOMBUCHA DO FOR YOU?

Now that you know what is kombucha, it's time to delve into its health benefits.

- *Improves Gut Health*

Research suggests that kombucha, like any other fermented food, is rich in probiotics — beneficial bacteria, similar to ones present in the gut. These bacteria improve many aspects of your gut health including digestion, inflammation and even weight loss. There's a definite co-relation between kombucha and gut health, which subsequently boosts the function of your immune system. So, when you're out for groceries, be sure to keep an eye out for some kombucha.

- *Rich in Antioxidants*

Kombucha, especially when made with green tea has antioxidant benefits to your liver and this fact was evident in a study which revealed that drinking kombucha regularly reduces liver toxicity caused by chemicals by as much as 70%. For those of you who don't know what antioxidants are, these are a substances that battle against free radicals and reactive molecules that can cause damage to your cells. Many scientists believe that natural sources of antioxidants from foods and beverages are far better for your health than antioxidant supplements.

- *Reduces the Risk of Heart Disease*

There are two markers of heart disease — 'bad' LDL and 'good' HDL cholesterol; kombucha is said to improve these markers greatly in as few as one month. Even more importantly, tea (especially green tea) protects LDL cholesterol particles from oxidation, which is thought to contribute to heart disease. What's more interesting is that green tea drinkers have up to a 31% lower risk of developing heart disease, a benefit that may also apply to kombucha.

- *Keeps Type 2 Diabetes in Check*

You may wonder how this sugary, fermented drink claims to keep type 2 diabetes in check. Well, a study among rats showed that kombucha slowed down the digestion of carbs (which turn into sugar), subsequently reducing blood sugar levels. It also found improved liver and kidney function. If we think about the fact that kombucha is made from green tea which is inherently beneficial, it makes sense that this beverage would reduce blood sugar levels. In fact, a review study on almost 300,000 individuals showed that green tea drinkers had an 18% lowered risk of becoming diabetic.

A SIMPLE GUIDE TO HOMEMADE KOMBUCHA

Ingredients per Batch

- 1 SCOBY (symbiotic culture of bacteria & yeast)
- 2 cups kombucha from a friend's batch or use unflavoured, unpasteurised kombucha from the store - this is the starter kombucha
- 14 cups filtered water
- 1 cup organic sugar
- 8 organic black tea bags
- Fruit juice, and/or herbs used for flavouring

Instructions:

1. Make the tea base

Bring water to a boil. Remove from heat and stir in the sugar to dissolve. Drop in the tea and allow it to steep until the water has cooled. Depending on the size of your pot, this will take a few hours. You can speed up the cooling process by placing the pot in an ice bath.

2. Add the starter tea

Once the tea is cool, remove the tea bags or strain out the loose tea. Stir in the starter tea. (The starter tea makes the liquid acidic, which prevents unfriendly bacteria from taking up residence in the first few days of fermentation.)

3. Transfer to jar and add SCOBY

Pour the mixture into a 4-litre glass jar (or divide between two jars, in which case you'll need 2 SCOBYs) and gently slide the SCOBY into the jar with clean hands. Cover the mouth of the jar with a few layers tightly, using woven cloth, coffee filters or paper towels and secure with a rubber band.

4. Ferment for 7-10 days

Keep the jar at room temperature, out of direct sunlight, and where it won't get jostled. Ferment for 7 to 10 days, checking the kombucha and the SCOBY periodically.

5. After 7 days, begin tasting the kombucha daily by pouring a little out of the jar and into a cup. When it reaches a balance of sweetness and tartness that is pleasant to you, the kombucha is ready to bottle.

6. Remove the SCOBY

Before proceeding, prepare and cool another pot of strong tea for your next batch of kombucha, as outlined above. With clean hands, gently lift the SCOBY out of the kombucha and set it on a clean plate. As you do, check it over and remove the bottom layer if the SCOBY is getting very thick.

7. Bottle finished kombucha

Measure out your starter tea from this batch of kombucha and set it aside for the next batch. Pour the fermented kombucha (strained, if desired) into bottles using a small funnel, along with any juice, herbs or fruit you may want to use as flavouring. Leave about a half inch of head room in each bottle.

8. Carbonate and refrigerate finished kombucha

Store the bottled kombucha at room temperature out of direct sunlight and allow 1 to 3 days for the kombucha to carbonate. Until you get a feel for how quickly your kombucha carbonates, it's helpful to keep it in plastic bottles; the kombucha is carbonated when the bottles feel rock solid. Refrigerate to stop fermentation and carbonation, and then consume your kombucha within a month.

