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## Food is digested in

So much of our daily health and emotional state hinges on how our body is reacting to the foods we put in it. A day of bad digestion and bloating can ruin your day. Over the past few years, fermented foods and the probiotics they contain have become a large part of the conversation about how to improve digestion. In fact, a Byrdie article from 2015 stated that fermented foods were “so hot right now.” As a refresher, fermented foods are products “that have been left to sit and steep until the sugars and carbs become bacteria-boosting agents,” says natural foods expert Annalea Krebs, CEO of Social Nature, a product sampling community that connects people to natural wellness products. “Consuming fermented whole foods, such as sauerkraut and kefir, goes way back to the diet of our ancestors, but they’ve seen a reemergence due to a plethora of research showing fermented foods provide a potent source of probiotics, which are key for immunity, digestion, disease protection, and even emotional health.” But knowing that fermented foods help improve digestion is only half the story. The other half is understanding exactly how they function in the body and then learning how to incorporate these seemingly bizarre items (kefir?) into our everyday diets. Keep scrolling to learn how to use fermented foods to beat belly bloat. The essential thing to know about fermented foods is that they contain the power to fix what processed foods have ruined in our digestive systems. “We’re literally killing our gut flora, one potato chip at a time!” Krebs says. Here’s what went wrong: “As a society, we have increased the use of broad-spectrum antibiotics and also consume a diet of highly processed foods. This combination has [diminished the] ecosystem of bacteria in the microbiome of our digestive organs,” explains Rebecca Lewis, a registered dietitian at HelloFresh. Consequently, digestive issues are widespread in the United States, but in recent years, scientific research has highlighted the importance of gut health for making things better. Thus, probiotic-rich fermented foods “have been enthusiastically called the new cure-all,” Lewis says. What makes probiotics so wonderful for gut health and digestion is the fact that they are live bacteria. “In other words, they don’t just sit in our stomach after consumption, but rather [they] go to work, helping to balance gut bacteria and stomach acids, releasing enzymes,” Krebs says. These enzymes encourage digestion, making it easier for our bodies to eliminate toxins and extract and absorb nutrients. Probiotics also help stave off infection, reduce bloating and inflammation, and influence the hormones our brains release, which affects our mood. The only tricky part with fermented foods is knowing what they are (and how to eat them). That’s where the following grocery list comes in. Getty Images Vivo Real Kefir Starter \$29 Shop Not familiar with kefir? Krebs describes it as “a fermented milk product (cow, goat, or sheep milk), much like a drinkable yogurt.” Both kefir and certain varieties of yogurt are rich in calcium and magnesium, as well as enzymes and probiotics. “When consumed regularly, these products can heal and target gut issues, such as irritable bowel disease, candida, and poor digestion,” Krebs says. We’re not talking about that sugary fruit-at-the-bottom yogurt, though. “Of the options available, look for products derived from grass-fed cows and lower in sugar, such as Icelandic yogurt, Greek-style yogurt, and organic kefir,” Krebs says. For a delicious and easy fermented breakfast, check out this kefir parfait recipe (which contains the added digestive benefits of cinnamon). Nope, kombucha isn’t just a trendy drink for health nuts. It’s made of fermented black tea and sugar (usually cane sugar or honey). “Following fermentation, kombucha becomes carbonated and provides a rich colony of bacteria, along with B vitamins, enzymes, and probiotics,” says Krebs. “Along with improving digestion, fans of kombucha report it also increases energy, detoxes the body, and promotes better immunity.” To reap the benefits, try working 16 ounces into your diet a few days a week. There are dozens of brands available, but make sure to look for one made in a smaller batch with organic ingredients. Krebs recommends the brand Health-Ade, which you can find a Whole Foods and other grocery stores using their store locator. Getty Images Wang Korean Canned Kimchi \$10 Shop “Kimchi is a Korean dish that’s made from a combination of vegetables, including cabbage, with spices and seasoning,” Krebs says. “Due to its high level of antioxidants and probiotics, kimchi is regarded as a gut-friendly, cancer-fighting food.” Better yet, eating vegetables in a fermented state “allows us to access to them [when] their high nutrient density is preserved,” Lewis says. Our favorite way to eat kimchi is in a stir-fry or ramen bowl. (Check out this easy kimchi ramen recipe). The Nue Co. Debloat Food Prebiotic \$55 Shop According to Krebs, “fermented protein powders and bars are relatively new to the fermented landscape. However, expect to see more cropping up.” The benefit to these plant-based supplements is that they provide both probiotics and protein without aggravating lactose intolerances or whey sensitivities. “By the process of fermentation, protein powders and bars are easier to digest, requiring the body to do less work to absorb nutrients,” Krebs says. Just make sure to look for products that are low in sugar, gluten, and fillers, like the one above. Getty Images Cultures For Health Tempeh Culture \$8 Shop Tempeh might not look so pretty when raw, but it is very a versatile food made from fermented soybeans. Tempeh can be transformed into a number of different dishes, including delicious stir-fry meals and a convincing vegan bacon. Despite the controversies surrounding soy, most nutritionists agree that when eaten in moderation, it can absolutely be a part of a healthy diet. Getty Images Don’t get too excited: We’re not recommending that you down a bottle of rosé every night. But there is room for alcohol in the life of someone with great digestion. How? “In some cases, the fermentation process actually creates additional nutrients,” Lewis says. “In the case of alcoholic beverages, B vitamin synthesis is part of the fermentation process.” That means four ounces of wine a couple of times per week provides a “microdose of essential B vitamins,” in addition to the benefits of probiotics. Next up, don’t miss six easy things you can do to detox your body in 24 hours. Fiber is an important part of a balanced diet. It has many health benefits, such as supporting weight management, aiding digestion, and reducing the risk of heart disease. Despite the benefits of fiber, a high-fiber diet is not recommended for everyone. Fiber is bulky, which tends to make us feel fuller for longer. Soluble fiber can even slow down digestion, resulting in delayed stomach emptying. This can lead to symptoms like gas and bloating. A low-fiber diet may be recommended to reduce certain symptoms and conditions related to digestion. Foods low in fiber tend to be easy to digest so choosing the following foods may help you feel better. Verywell / Alexandra Shytsman White rice is well-known for being an easy to digest food. It is low in fat and fiber, making it easy on the stomach. Many athletes prefer white rice instead of brown rice because it is not associated with any gastrointestinal issues. In fact, white rice is considered a “safe starch” for athletes because it is a easy source of carbohydrates for quick energy. To digest white rice even more easily, eat it alone or pair with other foods that are low in fat. Some foods that are high in fat, such as vegetable oils, take longer to digest and may cause discomfort. According to the USDA, 1/2 cup of cooked white rice may provide: 210 calories 4g protein 0g fat 49g carbohydrates 1g fiber Opting for fortified white rice may provide more vitamins and minerals. Verywell / Alexandra Shytsman Ripe bananas are a great fruit that is easy to digest for many people. While some fruits are high in fiber, bananas only contain a moderate amount of fiber. Bananas are also associated with improvements in both constipation and diarrhea, so people with a variety of digestive issues may experience relief when incorporating bananas into their diets. Per the USDA, 1 medium raw banana contains the following: 105 calories 1.3g protein 0.4g fat 27g carbohydrates 3g fiber Cooking bananas makes them even easier to digest since cooking food can make some nutrients more available for absorption. Make sure your bananas are ripe enough for consumption as unripe bananas will be more difficult to digest. Verywell / Alexandra Shytsman Cooked potatoes of all varieties are examples of easy to digest foods. Sweet potatoes are especially gentle on the digestive tract because they are mostly made up of insoluble fiber, which speeds up digestion and promotes regularity. According to the USDA, 1 medium sweet potato that is cooked and peeled may provide: 135 calories 3g protein 0.2g fat 31g carbohydrates 5g fiber To make potatoes even easier to digest, remove the skins and mash the inside of the potatoes. Removing the potato skins decreases the fiber content, and mashing them up makes digestion easier. Elise Bauer Soft foods like applesauce are recommended for some conditions like gastroparesis. Applesauce is a great source of vitamin C. According to the USDA, a 4-ounce serving of applesauce contains: 90 calories 0g protein 0g fat 22g carbohydrates 2g fiber Despite being made from apples, applesauce is low in fiber. Canned, cooked, or processed fruits tend to be lower in fiber and therefore easier to digest. Like ripe bananas, applesauce may help relieve both constipation and diarrhea. It is a go-to food to calm a variety of stomach-related ailments. Verywell / Alexandra Shytsman Like white rice, plain white bread is easier to digest than breads made with whole grains like wheat bread. This is because white bread is lower in fiber than other baked goods. Since white bread is a pantry staple in many households, you likely already have this food in your kitchen. Pair with low-fat toppings for an easy-to-digest sandwich for lunch or dinner, or try plain toast for breakfast. Per the USDA, 2 slices of plain white bread may provide: 150 calories 4g protein 28g carbohydrates 2g fat 1g fiber In addition to being easy on the stomach, white bread is usually fortified with nutrients including folic acid, B vitamins, vitamin D3, and more. Verywell / Alexandra Shytsman Many eating patterns allow for yogurt as a healthy breakfast or snack. Yogurt is associated with gastrointestinal health, weight management, and nutrient density. According to the USDA, 1 cup of plain yogurt made from whole milk contains the following: 149 calories 8.5g protein 0g fat 11.4g carbohydrates 0g fiber If you follow a low-fiber diet, yogurt is an excellent choice since it is free of fiber. However, it is still a good source of protein, fat, vitamins, and minerals. People with an intolerance or allergy to dairy products should avoid yogurt made with milk. Non-dairy yogurt alternatives may be suitable, though nutrition facts vary based on the ingredients. Verywell / Alexandra Shytsman While some fruits can cause digestive distress, others are known for being especially easy to digest. Melons like watermelon, cantaloupe, honeydew melon, and canary melon are great examples. What makes melons easy to digest is that they are made up almost entirely of water, making them nearly free of fiber. Per to the USDA, 1 cup of diced watermelon provides: 46 calories 0.9g protein 0.2g fat 11.5g carbohydrates 0.6g fiber Watermelon is also an excellent source of nutrients like vitamin C, vitamin A, copper, biotin, and more. Verywell / Alexandra Shytsman Depending on your symptoms or condition, certain vegetables may be easier to digest than others. For example, people following a low-FODMAP diet should avoid vegetables high in FODMAPs. This can help reduce symptoms associated with IBS. Low-FODMAP vegetables like squash are especially recommended for people with IBS who are looking for easy to digest foods that are still rich in nutrients. Eating a variety of vegetables can also improve the gut microbiome as well as ensure you are getting a range of nutrients. There are several types of squash to incorporate into your diet, such as butternut squash, acorn squash, spaghetti squash and more. According to the USDA, 1 cup of cooked spaghetti squash contains: 76 calories 1g protein 4.3g fat 9.7g carbohydrates 2.2g fiber Verywell / Alexandra Shytsman Oatmeal is a high-protein grain. Certain types of oatmeal, such as steel cut oats, are an excellent source of fiber. Instant oats, however, have the least amount of fiber of all the oat varieties, making them easier to digest. Per the USDA, 1 packet of plain instant oats contains: 101 calories 3.3g protein 1.9g fat 19.5g carbohydrates 2.8g fiber Opt for instant oats that are plain without added flavors or sugars for a quick, simple breakfast. Pair with other easy-to-digest foods like ripe banana and applesauce for meals that are easy on the digestive tract yet full of nutrients. Verywell / Alexandra Shytsman Lean animal proteins like chicken breast and turkey are naturally free of fiber, so they can be easy to digest. People experiencing digestive problems should consume lean animal protein like chicken and turkey breast over fattier options like certain cuts of red meat. Protein sources that are lower in fat are easier to digest. According to the USDA, a 3-ounce serving of skinless, boneless chicken breast may provide: 128 calories 26g protein 2.7g fat 0g carbohydrates 0g fiber Adopting a diet that is lower or higher in fiber may help aid in digestion. Easy-to-digest foods tend to be lower in fiber, but this is still an important part of a balanced diet. Other habits that may help stimulate digestion include drinking more water, exercising regularly, getting enough sleep, and reducing stress levels.

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