

Kombucha 101

Yes, you can brew it at home!



Equipment You'll Need

(list from Stefanie Dove, RDN, SNS)

Large rubber band

Coffee filter or cheesecloth

Black and/or green tea

Sugar

SCOBY

Brewed kombucha

Large mason jar

Smaller jars

What is kombucha? Kombucha is made by fermenting tea — usually black tea but green tea can also be used — with a combination of bacteria and yeast known as a SCOBY (symbiotic culture of bacteria and yeast), and sugar. Kombucha fermentation is a two-part process. First, the yeast converts sugar into ethanol and carbon dioxide, and then the bacteria convert the ethanol into organic acids. As kombucha ferments, the flavor changes from a fruity, sour flavor to a vinegary taste. The longer it's brewed, the more tart the flavor.

Kombucha contains live bacteria and yeast, organic acids, B vitamins, antioxidants, and trace amounts of minerals. Unflavored kombucha typically contains about 30 calories, 2-3 grams of sugar, and small levels of caffeine per 8-ounce serving. Kombucha contains no fat or cholesterol. Adding fruit juice or other types of flavoring will change the calorie and nutrient content. **Anyone with a compromised immune function, pregnant or lactating women, young children, or people with preexisting health conditions should avoid drinking kombucha** due to the potential for foodborne illness. It's important to remember that kombucha contains small amounts of alcohol.

What are the possible health benefits? The health benefits of kombucha are thought to be due to the probiotics it contains. Probiotics are live bacteria in fermented foods such as yogurt, kimchi, sauerkraut and kombucha that are beneficial for our digestive health. Results from animal studies show possible health benefits for our immune system, cardiovascular disease, arthritis, and digestive health, although more research is needed.

How to brew your own kombucha: Many people prefer to brew their own kombucha at home. To do so, carefully wash all equipment in hot soapy water and then sterilize in hot water. Boil 4 cups of water and add to a 1-gallon glass jar, then dissolve the sugar in the hot water. Add the tea to the sugar water and allow to steep for 5-10 minutes. Remove the tea. Add cool water to the brewed tea, leaving about 2 inches of space at the top of the jar. Cool until it reaches room temperature. Add the SCOBY and 1.5 cups of already-brewed kombucha to the jar. Cover the jar with a piece of cheesecloth or a couple of coffee filters, and secure tightly with a rubber band. Place the covered jar away from sunlight in a warm area of your house. Let it sit undisturbed for two weeks. After two weeks, remove the SCOBY and 1.5 cups liquid from the jar and place in a second clean and sterilized jar to use for your next batch of kombucha. Fill clean, sterilized glass bottles with your brewed kombucha to within ½" of the top. Tightly secure the top of the bottle, and let it sit on the kitchen counter for 5 days out of direct sunlight to build carbonation. Store in the fridge! *(Recipe from Laura McCann, MS, RD, LD).*