

Sauerkraut

Would you ever consider taking health advice from Captain James Cook? Apparently, he is credited with conquering scurvy (a Vitamin C deficiency) by bringing barrels of sauerkraut with him to sea and feeding it to the crew daily.

Sauerkraut, or fermented cabbage, is known for having many health benefits, not just the friendly bacteria for a healthy gastrointestinal (GI) tract.

According to Dr. Michelle Schoffro Cook, PhD, DNM, a registered nutritionist, these are some of the reasons to eat a little bit of sauerkraut every day.

1. **Antifungal Properties:** Sauerkraut contains beneficial bacteria that are miniature anti-fungal manufacturing facilities. Some of the probiotics in the fermented cabbage produce compounds to kill some species of *Candida* fungi. Published in the *Journal de Mycologie Medicale*, scientists found that the probiotics actually produced anti-fungal compounds to kill *Candida* – a common cause of vaginal or intestinal infections.
2. **Boosts Athletic Performance:** According to research published in *Current Sports Medicine Reports*, scientists found numerous sports-performance benefits of eating probiotic-rich foods, including reducing allergic conditions and enhancing recovery from fatigue, as well as improving immune function.
3. **Helps Heal the Heart:** Naturally-fermented foods like sauerkraut have been shown to boost levels of superoxide dismutase and glutathione peroxidase, which are powerful antioxidants that protect the heart against cellular damage from free radicals.
4. **Anti-Cancer Benefits:** Scientists at the Department of Food Science and Human Nutrition at the University of Illinois found that regularly eating fermented cabbage can help to regulate estrogen levels. Excess levels of estrogen have been linked to the development of estrogen dependent breast cancer. It can also help regulate hormones and may be helpful in the treatment of hormonally-linked health concerns, including menstrual difficulties and mood imbalances.

5. **Prevents Food Poisoning:** Research shows the probiotics in sauerkraut demonstrate antibacterial activity against harmful bacteria, including Salmonella and Shigella.
6. **Anti-Viral Properties:** Frequently found to contain the beneficial bacteria *L. plantarum* making sauerkraut a potential functional food for the treatment of colds, flu and chronic fatigue syndrome.

But not all sauerkraut has the beneficial probiotics. Many commercial manufacturers take shortcuts to increase profits by not waiting for the natural fermentation process to occur or by using white vinegar in a pickling process which doesn't contain any beneficial probiotics. Some pasteurize by a heating process to give the product a longer shelf life. This process kills any live cultures that are needed for the health benefits.

It is best to choose sauerkraut with live cultures found in the refrigerator section of your health food or grocery store or make it yourself at home.

You only need a spoonful a day for the probiotic benefits so put a dab on anything that might like a bit of punch to it like a salad, sandwich or piece of chicken.

To Your Health!

Pen Klohs, Nutritional Therapist at Shop for a Good Life