



# The Breathing School

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## The Miracle of Kefir.

### Probiotics

There are about 100 trillion microorganisms in the typical persons intestines. These microorganisms are commonly known as intestinal flora but the proper name is "intestinal microbiota" as flora refers to the plant world. The natural foods folks use the term probiotics, a word that was coined to be the opposite of antibiotics!

Bacteria make up most of this intestinal flora of which there are about 500 species and plus some fungi and protozoa. The relationship between the flora and the individual is mutual symbiotic relationship. You can live without any flora in your gut but you won't be very healthy. Some of the functions of the flora provides are:

1. Fermenting carbohydrates.
2. Preventing the growth of other harmful species of bacteria, molds, etc..
3. Training the immune system.
4. Producing vitamins.
5. Producing hormones.

### Kefir

The probiotic food that I prefer most is "**kefir**", and we eat it in our home nearly every day, usually in with our muesli or a breakfast smoothie. Kefir is a bacterial culture made up of an assortment of cream-colored cauliflower-like things. It is a complex symbiotic colony producing a rich assortment of about 35 types of friendly probiotic bacteria and yeasts. The original grains are more than 5000 years old originating either from the Caucasian Mountains or monasteries in Tibet. The nomadic peoples of the Caucasus region mixed cow, goat or sheep's milk with kefir grains in a leather bag and hung it in the sun in the doorway of the tent. It was regularly thumped by everyone passing in and out to keep the milk and the grains mixed.

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The kefir grains (as shown in the photograph above) ferment the milk at normal room temperatures turning it into a rich assortment of beneficial probiotics. The beneficial kefir is strained from the grains and can be used in smoothies, in place of yogurt or just consumed as it is. It is recommended that you consume half a cup to a full cup a day. The grains grow and multiply; ours double in size every 14 to 21 days. The excess grains can be given to friends or even eaten.

In ancient times in the Caucasus, the grains were known as the “Grains of the Prophet” and prized as much as the family jewels. They were jealously guarded. It was considered to have magical properties and strict religious law forbade it being given to non-believers. Kefir means “good feeling” in Turkish. When Russia took control of the Caucasus, Russian doctors saw first hand the successful use of kefir in the treatment of tuberculosis, intestinal and chronic diseases. Although Russians working in Caucasus were able to occasionally drink kefir, kefir grains were impossible to get. A quantity of it was “stolen” by a Russian woman called Irina in the pay of the Russian doctors. She used her charms to seduce a local prince and returned to Russia with a single cup of grains in 1908. It became part of the healing modality of Russian medicine for all kinds digestive and stomach problems and other illnesses. It is thought that most of the current strains around the world originate from that single cup of grains.

Consuming kefir has many benefits. It has been found to be an effective immune stimulant and antimicrobial against a wide variety of harmful bacteria. Kefir has been used to treat metabolic disorders, atherosclerosis, allergic disease, tuberculosis, cancer and other gastrointestinal disorders such as IBS. It is also associated with longevity. Kefir contains has an abundance of vitamins, minerals, amino acids and enzymes. These include calcium, phosphorus, magnesium, vitamin B2, and B12, vitamin K, A and D. It also contains the amino acid L-tryptophan that helps sleeplessness.

Many of us have difficulty digesting milk (lactose intolerance). The sugar in milk is very sticky and can cause mucus and other digestive problems. Having the kefir grains pre-digest the milk and turn it into a form that is more easily absorbed by the body, without the usual problems, is a wonderful way to consume milk.

Kefir is available either from friends or from suppliers in your country. Just search the Internet for a supplier and you can have a small pouch of the grains, with full instructions, sent to you by mail. The tradition is that you cannot purchase the grains as they were a gift from the Gods and are precious living beings. They are normally passed on with love and best wishes for good health. Any payment you make is a symbolic gift and designed to cover the cost of care and shipping.

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The commercial kefir drinks you see in the supermarket are really a form of buttermilk and not real kefir. It is interesting that kefir cannot be made commercially in large batches, but is very easy to make at home for personal use.

When you make kefir smoothies in a blender I suggest you blend everything but the kefir and then just before you drink it, you add the kefir gently and stir with a spoon. Otherwise the blades of a blender will kill many, if not all, of the beneficial bacteria. I have no proof of this, however there is scientific evidence that the post processing of commercial yogurt, where it is pumped it into the small containers you purchase, kills most of the bacteria. This would lead me to believe that the same will happen to kefir. A blender's job is to be pretty brutal!

## **Instructions**

### **What you will need:**

1. A glass jar with a lid. Choose a jar that is big enough for your needs.
2. A non-metal sieve/strainer with hole sizes between 2-5 mm.
3. A glass bowl with a rubber spatula.
4. Milk (cow, sheep, goat) preferably organic.
5. A rubber band to put around the jar to mark the level of grains

### **Making the kefir:**

1. Wash the glass jar in hot soapy water and rinse well. Cleanliness is very important.
2. Place the kefir grains in the glass jar and put the rubber band around the jar at the height of the grains.
3. Fill with the milk but do not overfill. Leave about 10% of the contents of the jar free as kefir gives off carbon dioxide and you need air above so it does not create too much pressure. The ratio of grains to milk should be about 1:15-20
4. Put the lid on firmly but not too tightly.
5. Place in place out of sunlight or any direct heat but not a cold room. Near the stove in the kitchen works well but not too close. Ideal temperature is about 25C.
6. Twice a day gently relieve any pressure by loosening the lid and tightening again. Invert the jar a couple of times to keep it mixed.

### **Separating the Kefir**

1. When the kefir is ready, all the milk will have coagulated around the grains. When you turn the jar over there is no more milk – only coagulated kefir and whey (the watery part of the milk). This will take about 48 hours. Put the sieve/strainer in the bowl and pour in the contents of the jar into the sieve gently.
2. Allow the kefir to flow into the bowl with the grains remaining in the sieve.
3. Gently move the kefir grains with a clean rubber/silicone spatula to aid in the separation.
4. The separated kefir is now ready for use. Until use it can be stored in the fridge. The grains remaining in the sieve are then used to make more kefir.
5. Wash the jar in which you made the kefir in with warm soapy water, and make more kefir as explained above.
6. Use the kefir in smoothies, on cereals or just drink it plain!

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### **Adjusting the strength.**

The sourness of the kefir mixture can be altered by changing the length of time fermenting, changing the ratio of grains to milk, or the temperature. I prefer to keep to the 48-hour time frame and a constant temperature, changing only the amount of the grains in the jar. They multiply anyway and have to be reduced from time to time so this is normal thing to do.

1. If too sour then remove some of the grains and move the rubber band marker down so you use less grains the next time. Each time you make the kefir remove any excess grains above the rubber bank marker. Store the excess in watered down milk in the fridge and passed it on to friends with love and best wishes for their health plus making sure you receive a small symbolic gift or payment in return.
2. If the taste is not sour enough, reduce the amount of milk until the amount the taste is too your liking. Maintain this ratio as the grains multiply.

### **Dos and Don'ts!**

1. Always treat the grains gently.
2. It is beneficial to wash the grains from time to time in cool water. Do not wash grains using chlorinated water - use filtered or distilled water.
3. If you have too much kefir or are going on vacation, then store the grains in watered down milk in the fridge. They may take a few days to get back into their rhythm.
4. You can store grains in your freezer indefinitely. Wrap the grains in some paper towel together with a little dried milk powder and place in the freezer.
5. Cleanliness is very important.
6. Always pass excess grains onto friends.

Best of luck!

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