

# Why Kefir is a Healthier Choice than Yogurt

by Sarah Pope MGA | Updated: May 15, 2019 (The Healthy Home Economist)

## Kefir is Easier than Yogurt to Culture Raw

Ensuring that you have the right type of yogurt starter for the purpose you have in mind, either raw or heated yogurt, can make all the difference to success. With the pricey cost of a gallon of raw, pastured milk in many areas, minimizing mistakes is very important.

If you have little room in the budget for mistakes and want to opt for the easiest raw fermented milk product to make, kefir is the way to go in my experience.

## Yogurt Only Contains a Few Transient Based Probiotics

While ease of fermentation is a big plus for kefir, the biggest reason of all to ferment kefir instead of yogurt is due to the differences in the bacterial cultures each contain.

Yogurt, for example, only contains 2-7 strains of beneficial bacteria, called probiotics. Yogurt also contains no beneficial yeasts.

What? Beneficial yeasts?

Yes, there is such a thing as yeasts that are helpful to health ... they help keep pathogenic yeasts in the gut like *Candida* at bay.

A traditional yogurt starter contains the following strains of probiotics: *Bifidobacterium lactis*, *Lactobacillus acidophilus*, *Lactobacillus bulgaricus*, and *Streptococcus thermophilus*.

Greek yogurt, which has taken the healthfood community by storm, is ironically the least beneficial of all, usually containing only *Lactobacillus bulgaricus* and *Streptococcus thermophilus*. This is an important distinction as many folks wonder about [Greek yogurt vs regular](#) and which is actually healthier.

There is another shortcoming of the beneficial bacteria in yogurt: they are transitory in nature meaning they don't colonize the digestive tract. Don't get me wrong, yogurt based probiotics are valuable in that they help keep the digestive tract clean and provide food for the beneficial bacteria that are already colonized in the gut.

**The probiotic strains in yogurt, however, do not colonize the gut themselves, and just pass through which requires a constant infusion to maintain the same health benefit.**

A word of warning concerning yogurt and Greek yogurt containing *Streptococcus thermophilus* from Jordin Rubin, author of [Restoring Your Digestive Health](#):

Studies have shown that people who suffer from autoimmune diseases run the risk of aggravating the symptoms of their disease if they consume more than two cups of yogurt that contains *Streptococcus thermophilus*. What's more, *Streptococcus thermophilus* can cause a shift in immune function known as a Th2-dominated immune system. People with Th2-mediated immune systems have higher incidences of allergies and other illnesses. People suffering from digestive problems usually have imbalanced or weak immune systems. For this reason, avoiding products that may contribute to immune system dysfunction is wise if you have an intestinal disease.

So if you are seeking the best fermented milk product for gut health, it's probably not yogurt particularly not in excess of two cups per day if the yogurt starter contains the strain *Streptococcus thermophilus*.

## Beneficial Microbes in Kefir Blow Yogurt Away by a Country Mile

Milk kefir is quite different from yogurt in that the strains contained colonize the intestinal tract and don't just pass through with temporary benefit. Some of the strains in kefir are aggressive in nature too, which means they attack and destroy pathogens reasserting dominance and control of the intestinal environment.

This is why eating a ton of kefir when you have gut imbalance issues can sometimes trigger a temporary [healing crisis](#) from pathogen die-off in the gut. Eating lot of yogurt rarely causes this type of reaction as the effect on digestive health is much milder.

In addition, kefir contains a lot larger range of bacteria, as well as beneficial yeasts which combat *Candida* problems.

Here is a list of the typical strains of probiotics and beneficial yeasts in properly fermented kefir, according to the Journal *Food Microbiology*:

### Beneficial Bacteria in Kefir (only 2-7 in yogurt)

- *Lactobacillus acidophilus*
- *Lactobacillus brevis*
- *Lactobacillus casei*
- *Lactobacillus delbrueckii subsp. bulgaricus*
- *Lactobacillus delbrueckii subsp. delbrueckii*
- *Lactobacillus delbrueckii subsp. lactis*
- *Lactobacillus helveticus*
- *Lactobacillus kefirianofaciens subsp. kefirianofaciens*
- *Lactobacillus kefiri*
- *Lactobacillus paracasei subsp. paracasei*
- *Lactobacillus plantarum*
- *Lactobacillus rhamnosus*
- *Lactobacillus sake*
- *Lactococcus lactis subsp. cremoris*
- *Lactococcus lactis subsp. lactis*
- *Lactococcus lactis*
- *Leuconostoc mesenteroides subsp. cremoris*
- *Leuconostoc mesenteroides subsp. dextranicum*
- *Leuconostoc mesenteroides subsp. mesenteroides*
- *Pseudomonas*

- *Pseudomonas fluorescens*
- *Pseudomonas putida*
- *Streptococcus thermophilus*

## Beneficial Yeasts in Kefir (none in yogurt)

- *Candida humilis* (yeast)
- *Kazachstania unispora* (yeast)
- *Kazachstania exigua* (yeast)
- *Kluyveromyces siamensis* (yeast)
- *Kluyveromyces lactis* (yeast)
- *Kluyveromyces marxianus* (yeast)
- *Saccharomyces cerevisiae* (yeast)
- *Saccharomyces martiniae* (yeast)
- *Saccharomyces unisporus* (yeast)

Quite a big difference in the probiotic benefit between kefir and yogurt, isn't there? Moreover, due to the higher potency of kefir, it is easy to stay under the 2 cups per day limit recommended by Jordin Rubin (quoted above) for those with a sensitivity to the *Streptococcus thermophilus* probiotic strain.

If you are trying your hand at home fermentation of milk in order to improve your digestive health and rebalance the gut environment with beneficial microbes dominating instead of pathogenic strains, kefir is going to be the more potent choice for you and your family.

And, while kefir definitely has a stronger, more sour taste than the milder tasting yogurt, you are guaranteed to not notice the difference if your primary use is for smoothies!

Looking for either thermophilic or mesophilic starter cultures for yogurt or kefir? [Click here](#) for where I get mine and where I recommend for the best quality and potency.