



CLOCKWISE, FROM LEFT: James Kuiper is all smiles since he discovered fermented foods. • Sexy Food also sells takeaway krauts and kimchis. • Karin Rose, James Kuiper and some of Karin's children pictured on Rose Estate near Greyton. • Dr Yesheen Singh believes ancient medicine holds many of the answers to current problems. • Sexy Food is a serene haven in the heart of Cape Town.

CULTURE CLUB

Meet the people who are rediscovering what ancient fermented foods can do for the health of your gut – and your body as a whole. **By Nick Dall**

"When I was 17, I was diagnosed with lymphatic cancer," says James Kuiper, who's now 30 and the owner of Sexy Food restaurant in Cape Town. "Aggressive chemotherapy put the cancer into



remission, but four years later, I still felt terrible. I got sick all the time and I found it impossible to recapture the old me. I could feel the cancer coming back, my heartburn was agonising and I knew I couldn't go through another round of chemotherapy.

"I actually see getting cancer as a blessing," he continues, "as it made me re-evaluate everything. Western medicine is fixated with treating symptoms, but it does very little to tackle the root cause of the problem."

Kuiper soon realised that he was allergic to most processed foods and started modifying his diet. "I felt a bit better," he reflects, "but going on a removal diet wasn't enough. I realised that I had to put good stuff into my system too."



He spent a year as an apprentice on a sprout and microgreen farm and, using the knowledge he'd gained, developed a vegetarian burger patty which he sold at various Cape Town markets. This brought him into contact with many people in the alternative health scene who opened his eyes to the wonders of fermented food.

"During fermentation, food's exposed to bacteria and

yeasts, either through an added culture or naturally through the air," he explains, between sips of kombucha. "It's widely acknowledged that about 80% of our immune system is found in our gut, but very few people realise the massive impact fermented foods can have on our digestive health by pre-digesting food and making nutrients more bio-available. Within months, I was feeling much healthier and

happier and now – four years down the line – I'm a completely different person."

YEARS OF EXPERIENCE

One of the people Kuiper met was Karin Rose, who – together with her husband Bogdan and 10 children – manufactures her own kimchi and kombucha using homegrown organic produce on her farm near Greyton. "Bogdan's family comes from Germany and Ukraine, so they've been culturing for generations," explains Rose. "I started when we got married in 1984 and have been experimenting ever since."

Little by little, Rose discovered that cultured products can be both delicious and extremely good for you, and she felt it was a shame to keep this revelation to herself. "People say fermented foods are the next big thing," she laughs, "but they're really as old as the hills. Before we had freezers and canned food, everyone had to do this.

"Kimchi is incredible – you start off with cabbage, but you end up with so much more," she adds. "I feed it to my family and my dogs and I find eating it eliminates my own sugar cravings. I've just received a letter from a client who reversed her colon condition by eating two jars of kimchi every day."

nutritious 'waste materials' which give you access to vitamins, minerals and enzymes you may otherwise have a hard time incorporating into your diet," he explains. "From my perspective, fermented foods that use an alkalising vegetable substrate, such as sauerkraut and kimchi, are the healthiest. I'd be wari-er of things like kombucha, as some of the unfermented substrate will always remain and a sugar-based kombucha could still contain quite a bit of sucrose.

"That said, kombucha will always be better for you than a soft drink and there are honey-based kombuchas which are very good for you. I always advise patients to read the list of



ON THE MENU

KOMBUCHA: A sweetened tea that's fermented using a community of living organisms and tastes a little like a delicate, alcohol-free champagne.

KEFIR: Yoghurt made using whole milk and cultures from the kefir plant, which originates in the Caucasus Mountains in Russia.

MISO: A traditional Japanese paste made from cooked soybeans, rice and the koji fermentation culture.

TEMPEH: Cooked soybean patties which originated in Indonesia and are bound together by dense rhizopus mould.

KIMCHI: A Korean pickle made using chopped, fresh vegetables, natural salt and other seasonings that ferment in a ceramic crockpot.

KRAUT: A German pickle that's quite similar to kimchi, but contains less seasoning.

"Fermented foods contain lots of healthy bacteria and nutritious 'waste materials' which give you access to vitamins, minerals and enzymes you may otherwise have a hard time incorporating into your diet."

ASK THE EXPERTS

Dr Yesheen Singh is a qualified medical doctor with a special interest in plant-based medicine and nutrition. "Unfortunately, there's very little clinical research on fermented foods," he says. "But when I look at their history in ancient Chinese and Ayurvedic medicine and combine this with their positive impact on the digestive health of some of my patients, I'm left in little doubt that we could all benefit from eating them.

"Fermented foods contain lots of healthy bacteria and

ingredients on a product before buying it. If anything's unclear, call the manufacturer and ask how the product's made. Only then should you buy it for a 30-day trial."

Another medical professional who's convinced that fermented foods are one of the tools we can use to become healthier is James Raaff, a registered biokineticist who also has a certificate in integrative medicine. "The human body contains 100 times more symbiotic bacteria than it does human cells. When we put food in our mouths,

we chew it and swallow it and our stomach goes to work to digest it all, but we're still left with relatively large chunks," he says. "This is where bacteria come in. The vast gut microbiome inhabits the small recesses of the stomach, like the bugs and microbes between the grass blades in your garden. Trillions of bacteria cells are needed to complete the final stages of digestion before nutrients can be moved into the blood and distributed. "Scientists, chemists and everyone who shares a

systemic view of human health are convinced that a better understanding of the gut biome is essential to improving overall wellness and there's growing evidence that the gut and the brain are intrinsically linked," he enthuses. "In time we'll be able to run tests on individuals to determine which particular bacteria might be needed and in what quantity, but for now we can safely say that the human body makes great use of fermented foods."

What better way to start the voyage of discovery than with a bunless burger at Sexy Food? It contains no fewer than six different fermented foods and is utterly delicious to boot. Otherwise, simply pop in to any Wellness Warehouse in Cape Town or Joburg to stock up on Karin's krauts, kimchis and kombuchas which are sold under the Rose Estate label. 🌱

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