PUBLIC HEALTH
GREY BRUCE HEALTH UNIT

FACT SHEET

Grey Bruce Health Unit, 101 17th Street East, Owen Sound, N4K 0A5
519-376-9420 • www.publichealthgreybruce.on.ca • 1-800-263-3456

Kombucha Tea

(kômˈbo͞oCHə)

What is kombucha?

Kombucha tea (usually black or green) has been fermented and sweetened to create a slightly acidic tea. The tea leaves are steeped in hot water and sweetened for taste. The tea is then fermented using a culture of yeast and bacteria called SCOBY. The fermentation process usually takes around 7 days to complete at room temperature to achieve a pH between 2.5- 4.2. Refrigeration is required in order to stop the fermentation process.

Why is pH important for kombucha?

Determining the pH of kombucha is essential to determining the safety of the product. Kombucha with a pH lower than 2.5 will continue to ferment and produce excess alcohol and acetic acid. Kombucha with a pH greater than 4.2 permits the growth of some hazardous bacteria. Fermented kombucha with a pH less than 2.5 or greater than 4.2 should be discarded.

Does kombucha require refrigeration?

Once the desired pH is achieved, kombucha must be pasteurized or refrigerated to halt fermentation. The options are as follows:

1. Pasteurize: pasteurized kombucha is shelf stable and does not require refrigeration.
2. Refrigerate: refrigerate kombucha at or below a temperature of 4˚C (40˚F) to prevent bacterial growth.
3. Additives: adding sodium benzoate (0.1%) and potassium sorbate (0.1%). Refrigeration is still required to prevent mold growth and acetic acid production

Best Practices

- ✓ Kombucha is produced in an inspected facility
- ✓ Utensils and bottles must be cleaned and sanitized
- ✓ Tea leaves are steeped in hot water at 74˚C (165˚F) and tea is cooled from 60˚C (140˚F) to 20˚C (68˚F) within two hours
- ✓ Discard SCOBY and/or kombucha if mold growth is present or if pH exceeds recommended range
- ✓ Use a calibrated pH meter to determine the pH of each batch
- ✓ Use new culture on first use, then reuse culture for next batch
- ✓ Labelled with best before date and warnings not to consume more than 4oz (110ml) per day due to increased risk of acidosis