

OR – 16

The MAGIC of KEFIR

A. The shepherds of the North Caucasus region of Europe were only trying to transport milk the best way they knew how — in leather pouches strapped to the side of donkeys — when they made a significant discovery. A fermentation process would sometimes inadvertently occur en route, and when the pouches were opened upon arrival they would no longer contain milk but rather a pungent, effervescent, low alcoholic substance instead. This unexpected development was a blessing in disguise. The new drink — which acquired the name kefir — turned out to be a health tonic, a naturally-preserved dairy product and tasty addition to our culinary repertoire.

B. Although their exact origin remains a mystery, we do know that yeast-based kefir grains have always been at the root of the kefir phenomenon. These grains are capable of a remarkable feat: in contradistinction to most other items you might find in a grocery store, they actually expand and propagate with use. This is because the grains, which are granular to the touch and bear a slight resemblance to cauliflower rosettes, house active cultures that feed on lactose when added to milk. Consequently, a bigger problem for most kefir drinkers is not where to source new kefir grains, but what to do with the ones they already have!

C. The great thing about kefir is that it does not require a manufacturing line in order to be produced. Grains can be simply thrown in with a batch of milk for ripening to begin. The mixture then requires a cool, dark place to live and grow, with periodic unsettling to prevent clumping (Caucasus inhabitants began storing the concoction in animal-skin satchels on the back of doors — every time someone entered the room the mixture would get lightly shaken). After about 24 hours the yeast cultures in the grains have multiplied and devoured most of the milk sugars, and the final product.

D. Nothing compares to a person's first encounter with kefir. The smooth, uniform consistency rolls over the tongue in a manner akin to liquefied yogurt. The sharp, tart pungency of unsweetened yogurt is there too, but there is also a slight hint of effervescence, something most users will have previously associated only with mineral waters, soda or beer. Kefir also comes with a subtle aroma of yeast, and depending on the type of milk and ripening conditions, ethanol content can reach up to two or three percent —about on par with a decent lager — although you can expect around 0.8 to one per cent for a typical day-old preparation. This can bring out a tiny edge of alcohol in the kefir's flavour.

E. Although it has prevailed largely as a fermented milk drink, over the years kefir has acquired a number of other uses. Many bakers use it instead of starter yeast in the preparation of sourdough, and the tangy flavour also makes kefir an ideal buttermilk substitute in pancakes. Kefir also accompanies sour cream as one of the main ingredients in cold beetroot soup and can be used in lieu of regular cow's milk on granola or cereal. As a way to keep their digestive systems fine-tuned, athletes sometimes combine kefir with yoghurt in protein shakes.

F. Associated for centuries with pictures of Slavic babushkas clutching a shawl in one hand and a cup of kefir in the other, the unassuming beverage has become a minor celebrity of the 21st century health food movement in the contemporary West. Every day, more studies pour out supporting the benefits of a diet high in probiotics¹. This trend toward consuming probiotics has engulfed the leisure classes in these countries to the point that it is poised to become, according to some commentators, "the next multivitamin". These days the word kefir is consequently more likely to bring to mind glamorous, yoga mat-toting women from Los Angeles than austere visions of blustery Eastern Europe.

G. Kefir's rise in popularity has encouraged producers to take short cuts or alter the production process. Some home users have omitted the ripening and culturation process while commercial dealers often add thickeners, stabilisers and sweeteners. But the beauty of kefir is that, at its healthiest and tastiest, it is a remarkably affordable, uncluttered process, as any accidental invention is bound to be. All that is necessary are some grains, milk and a little bit of patience. A return to the unadulterated kefir-making of old is in everyone's interest.

¹Probiotic = substance containing beneficial and intestine-friendly microorganisms

Questions 1-7

Reading Passage has seven paragraphs, A—G.

Choose the correct heading for each paragraph from the list of headings below.

1. Section A
2. Section B
3. Section C
4. Section D
5. Section E
6. Section F
7. Section G

List of Headings

- i. A unique sensory experience
- ii. Getting back to basics
- iii. The gift that keeps on giving
- iv. Variations in alcohol content
- v. Old methods of transportation
- vi. Culinary applications
- vii. Making kefir
- viii. A fortunate accident
- ix. Kefir gets an image makeover
- x. Ways to improve taste

Questions 8—11

Answer the questions below using **NO MORE THAN TWO WORDS** from the passage for each answer.

Write your answers in boxes 8—11 on your answer sheet.

8. What do kefir grains look like?
9. What needs to happen to kefir while it is ripening?
10. What will the yeast cultures have consumed before kefir is ready to drink?
11. The texture of kefir in the mouth is similar to what?

Questions 12 and 13

Choose **TWO** letters, A—E.

Write the correct letters in boxes 12 and 13 on your answer sheet.

Which **TWO** products are **NOT** mentioned as things which kefir can replace?

- A. Ordinary cow's milk
- B. Buttermilk
- C. Sour cream
- D. Starter yeast
- E. Yoghurt

Answers – OR 16

1. viii
2. iii
3. vii
4. i
5. vi
6. ix
7. ii
8. cauliflower rosettes
9. periodic unsettling
10. milk sugars
11. liquefied yoghurt
- 12 - 13. C, E (IN EITHER ORDER)

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