

# Kombucha

## Rediscovered

Revised Edition

*The Medicinal Benefits of an Ancient Healing Tea*

Klaus Kaufmann, DSc



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Books Alive  
Summertown, TN



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Cover and interior design: Deirdre Nemmers  
Cover photography: Andrew Schmidt and Liz Murray

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Books Alive, an imprint of Book Publishing Company  
PO Box 99  
Summertown, TN 38483  
888-260-8458  
bookpubco.com

ISBN 13: 978-0-920470-84-8

19 18 17 16 15 14 13      1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9

Printed in The United States of America  
Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Kaufmann, Klaus N., 1942-

Kombucha rediscovered! : the medicinal benefits of an ancient healing tea / Klaus Kaufmann. -- Revised edition.

pages cm

Includes bibliographical references and index.

ISBN 978-0-920470-84-8 (pbk.) -- ISBN 978-0-920470-76-3 (e-book)

1. Kombucha tea. 2. Tea fungus--Therapeutic use. I. Title.

RM666.T25K38 2013

615.3'21--dc23

2012038851



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To my devoted mother, who brewed  
the tastiest tea in the world.

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*I suppose I ought to eat or drink something or other; but the great question is, what? Alice looked all round her at the flowers and the blades of grass, but she did not see anything that looked like the right thing to eat or drink under the circumstances. There was a large mushroom growing near her, about the same height as herself; and when she had looked under it, and on both sides of it, and behind it, it occurred to her that she might as well look and see what was on the top of it.*

—Lewis Carroll, *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*



# Contents

Foreword, by Terry Willard, PhD

Publisher's Note to the First Edition

Acknowledgments

Introduction

Chapter One: **Introducing Kombucha**

Chapter Two: **Kombucha's Illustrious Past and Promise**

Chapter Three: **A Closer Look at Kombucha**

Chapter Four: **Health Benefits**

Chapter Five: **Making Kombucha Tea**

Chapter Six: **The Professional Brews**

Glossary

Resources

Bibliography

Index

## Foreword

Hardly a day goes by at the Wild Rose College of Natural Healing or clinic that someone doesn't phone to ask a question about kombucha tea, which callers also may refer to as "the mushroom tea" or maybe "that pancake mushroom tea." Given the current level of interest, the timing couldn't be more appropriate for an informative book about this healing tea.

Is the tea just a fad? Kombucha tea's popularity has come and gone over the centuries. Knowledge of it goes back at least two thousand years, a substantial span of time, I think, that clearly indicates that kombucha tea is here to stay. How, then, should we describe it? Is it food from the gods? Is it a panacea? Can it cure conditions as diverse as arthritis, baldness, and cancer? I hope you'll find answers to such questions, and many more, in this book.

While commercial brands of kombucha tea can be purchased in some natural food stores, the tea is most often brewed at home. With each fresh batch, a new kombucha culture (a "baby") is formed, making it possible for home brewers to pass along new cultures to family members and friends. Because brewing kombucha tea involves microorganisms, careful handling of the kombucha culture is a must, as is using proven methods, like those described in this book, when making the tea at home. These are probably the most important considerations related to the tea.

Is kombucha tea safe for everyone? Many practitioners have suggested that people who have an impaired or weakened immune system should avoid the tea. Others recommend that people who have yeast infections shouldn't use the tea. In addition, some have cautioned people with diabetes against using the tea because of its potential sugar content. However, since all kombucha teas don't contain the same strains of bacteria and yeast, and because brewing time largely determines the sugar content in the final product, these concerns may apply to some teas but not to others.

I believe we'll be hearing many more reports of healing agents coming from such microorganisms as bacteria, yeast, and fungi. Although I don't believe that any medicinal substance can in itself cure an ailment, I heartily acknowledge that some substances can help us on the way to a better quality of life. This includes the medicinal use of microorganisms, which isn't a new approach. Many mainstream antibiotics, for example, were derived from microorganisms. In addition, some people introduce friendly bacteria, such as acidophilus, into their diets in the form of yogurt or supplements, because having a proper ecological balance of microorganisms in the gut can be so important in determining one's overall state of health.

As time goes on, the mystery about kombucha tea will be solved; science will reveal explanations for the tea's functional effects on human physiology. In the meantime, if you want to become a kombucha tea drinker or brewmaster, or are simply curious about what kombucha tea is, this book is a good place to start.





## Publisher's Note to the First Edition

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The modern age dawned and with it came the nightmare of modern food preparation. Refrigeration, pasteurization, canning, processing, and freezing may be convenient in our fast-paced society, but these methods have made our food base devoid of nutrition. All of these commonplace practices rob food of its vitamins, minerals, enzymes, and essential fatty acids. As a result, we have seen a dramatic increase in the frequency of such frightening diseases as cancer, and people are plagued with chronic diseases of the bowels, stomach, and liver. Poor nutrition—and thus poor health—has led people to search for alternative methods of food preparation. Often, these seekers simply rediscover ancient practices.

Lately, there has been renewed awareness of the benefits of lactic acid-fermented foods. Lactic acid fermentation is the oldest-known method for preserving food. To keep fruits and vegetables for the winter, our ancestors fermented them and stored them underground in storage cellars, which, unlike our modern basements, were not sealed from moisture and air. Many of the other staples in our ancestors' diets were preserved and stored in this manner. Whole, raw, and unrefined foods were stored with such fermented foods as sourdough bread, kefir, cured meats, and natural cheeses. These foods provided the nutritional foundation for an active life. Today, however, according to postindustrial perspectives about nutrition, these forms of food preparation and storage are considered primitive and tedious. Yet, such common and ancient practices can't be dismissed so easily. Luckily for us, fermented foods are coming back into fashion.

Why are fermented foods so critical for good health? The answer to this question is clear. The fermentation process has been proven to produce a variety of health-supporting substances, from acetylcholine, which benefits the body's nervous system, to choline, which normalizes blood pressure and prevents hypertension. In addition, fermented foods are rich in vitamins B and C and are full of enzymes. Unlike other methods of food preservation, lactic acid fermentation maintains the life and the nutritional value of the microorganism that is involved in the fermentation. Lactic acids, the direct products of the fermentation process, are found in such foods as yogurt and sauerkraut, and they benefit the human body in more ways than was previously imagined. "Good" lactic acid—also called L(+) lactic acid—successfully battles digestive problems by aiding the expulsion and elimination of unfriendly bacteria and cleansing the bowels. Detoxification is a key principle of optimal health, as the elimination of unnecessary substances provides the body with boundless energy and life.

The lost art of fermentation was bound to be rediscovered. Most discoveries start with a mystery in which only hints and clues are revealed. Kombucha tea, a fermented beverage, is one of these clues. Used for centuries, the tea is worthy of our attention. When kombucha tea is added to a balanced diet, the mystery of obtaining ideal health by consuming properly prepared foods and drinks is well on the way to being solved.

—Siegfried Gursch

# Acknowledgments

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This book is the product of two passions that have been with me throughout my life. First, I have had a love of writing since I was published and won a writer's prize when I was only ten years old. Second, I have searched for the secret to perfect health since I was misdiagnosed by orthodox medicine at the age of fourteen.

My lifelong interest in health led me to research and write the first edition of this book in the 1990s. At that time, some truly remarkable people provided me with knowledge about the kombucha culture and kombucha tea, and I want to offer my very special thanks to my 1990s kombucha gurus: Waltraut Schaffer, Wal Kneifel, Murray Mitchell, Alex Lauder, Sandra Poulton, and Peter Theiss. For this second edition, I want to acknowledge the people who have provided new and exciting insights, including Suzanne Stoeckle, Sergi Rollan, and Chantale Houle, all of Kefiplant. And last, but not least, I give my thanks to Matthew Breech of TallGrass, a distributor of kombucha products based in Vancouver, British Columbia, that is quickly conquering the Canadian health food market, for allowing me to sample all of his medicinal kombucha products.

All of these individuals contributed meaningfully either toward the "brewing" of the first edition or the "rebrewing" of the second edition of this book. Furthermore, the first edition was made possible by kombucha lover and former publisher Siegfried Gursche, while this updated version exists thanks to my new publishers, Cynthia and Bob Holzappel, and their staff at Book Publishing Company. As always, my wife, Gabriele, who is constantly interested in what I'm up to, diligently supported my efforts, and our beautiful cat, Samedi, curled up at my feet and kept me company for hours on end.



## Introduction

Kombucha tea has come a long way since I initially researched the topic and published the first edition of this book. Today, there's a kombucha renaissance as commercial versions of not only the tea but also a number of spin-off products become increasingly available in North America and many other parts of the world. Another indication of kombucha tea's renewed popularity is the continued enthusiasm for brewing it at home. This ancient remedy, which emerged in Asia centuries ago, has had a steady presence in Russia and periodically reappeared during resurgences elsewhere in Europe over the past hundred years or so.

As is often the case, newer state-of-the-art research can be useful in supplementing older findings. The updated edition of this book includes the most current information I could find, which we'll explore alongside the fruits of my original research. Because kombucha tea is very ancient—rather than very new—my earlier findings largely remain relevant. By combining them with the most up-to-date information about kombucha tea, I hope to resolve any misunderstandings or misinformation that readers may have about the tea.

The early chapters of this book (see chapters 1 through 3) introduce both the kombucha culture and kombucha tea, providing details about their history as well as existing theories and published research. There's still some mystery surrounding kombucha tea, and questions remain about its effective ingredients and exactly how the tea works as a healing agent. I expect answers to these questions will be found over time. For now, we have a wealth of anecdotal evidence and a rich history on which to base our faith in kombucha tea. In chapter 4, I share information about how the tea seems to be useful for specific ailments.

A seemingly ever-increasing number of commercially brewed kombucha teas is now on the market, and many are quite different from home-brewed kombucha teas. While I include a new section in this book about the professional brews (see [chapter 6](#)), which can be quite tasty, this book is dedicated primarily to making kombucha tea at home (see [chapter 5](#)). For me, brewing the tea myself is a labor of love and a rewarding hobby.

I learned about kombucha tea when I was exploring health-related topics for my other books. After encountering many ailing and overweight people during research trips throughout the United States and Canada, I decided to write a book on juice fasting for cleansing, slimming, and health restoration. The final product was titled *The Joy of Juice Fasting*, and it was while I was writing about this topic that I first heard about kombucha tea. Fasting and cleansing are vital contributors to health and well-being, and consuming ample amounts

healthful beverages is imperative to overall health. When I discovered kombucha tea, I got a good feeling about the tea's innate restorative value for fasting, detoxifying, and last, but not least, pure drinking enjoyment.

Then, while I was studying silica for two other books that I wrote, *Silica: The Forgotten Nutrient* and *Silica: The Amazing Gel*, I observed that though we often scorn simple remedies inspired healers throughout history, including the ancient Chinese and Greeks, used them consistently and successfully. While we might tend to think of these medicine men and women of old as having mystical powers, the reality is that they had a deep knowledge of the simple healing arts. Modern science is only now rediscovering some of these secrets. In the West, in particular, science has "forgotten" and has had to "discover" and reintroduce us to many ancient healing herbs and substances. Prompted by these thoughts, I recalled the ancient healing tea.

I decided to study kombucha tea in earnest in 1990 with plans to write a self-help guide about it. When I sent out feelers on the topic, a German friend told me she had seen what she called "a wondrous mushroom" on her mother's kitchen shelf in her apartment downtown Munich. In fact, over time, the kombucha culture has frequently been referred to as a "mushroom," so this comment by my friend isn't surprising to me now. My friend told me that, oddly enough, she had failed to ask her mother about "that thing" floating in a brownish liquid, and her mother never offered her any explanations about it either. Years later, after my friend had moved to Canada, an acquaintance gave her a similar "mushroom," urging it on her as a great cure-all. The acquaintance referred to it as the "Manchurian," and with it she gave my friend a hand-me-down leaflet on how to cultivate this "Manchurian." As I later discovered, "Manchurian mushroom" is another popular name for the kombucha culture.

We are talking about a "Panacea" Manchurian Mushroom that takes seven days to reproduce itself, it looks like a grayish colored hot cake. It is very fast growing and turns the tea into radical proteins, enzymes and vitamins that work to clean and detoxify your blood very quickly. Properly cultivated it is good for:

1. Eliminates wrinkles and helps removal of brown spots on hands, It's a skin humectant
2. Prevents certain types of cancer in Manchuria, where this mushroom is from, not one case of cancer has been detected. Each day the people drink this tea as a religious atonement.
3. During menopause, reduces hot-flash discomforts. Just after drinking the tea you may feel a warm sensation, due to the fact that the tea components join the blood stream causing a draining action of toxic chemical elements and fluids, the reason for which you will notice increased mobility in your extremities and flexibility around your waist.
4. Helps with constipation.
5. Helps muscular aches and pains in the shoulders and neck.
6. Helps bronchitis, asthma, coughs in 2 days. Helps children with phlegm.
7. Helps with allergies, also with aching nerves.
8. It is prescribed in kidney problems.
9. It's proven useful in cataracts and other formations on the cornea.
10. It cleanses the gall bladder, helps colitis and nervous stomachs.
11. It helps heal diseases. It will lower cholesterol & softens veins & arteries.
12. It will stop infectious diarrhea.
13. Helps burning of fat, therefore it also helps one to lose weight.
14. Helps with insomnia.
15. Helps the liver work more efficiently.
16. Helps to level off glucose, and sudden drops of blood sugar in diabetes. Taken daily, it eliminates urea in 100 days.
17. It has surprising effects on the scalp, it helps avoid balding, thickens hair, helps to eliminate gray hair.
18. Helps digestion.

The Manchurian Mushroom has all of these miraculous properties. It was brought into Mexico from Shogegachum, Manchuria, on the Siberian border.

#### HOW TO PREPARE YOUR TEA AND PROPAGATE THE MUSHROOM

You must use a glass or enameled pot or container (3 1/2 quart glass pot by Visions is ideal) there can be no metal rim. When you handle the mushroom, take off all of your rings and any other metal that could come into near proximity to the mushroom. If you use a spoon be sure it is wooden plastic or ceramic.

Heat 3 quarts of water, when it starts to boil add 1 cup of

Spring Water  
or  
Distilled

\* 1-CUP

5 TEA BAGS  
LET STEEP

When my friend showed me the old leaflet, I found its fragmentary instructions so powerful that I decided to reproduce the leaflet in this book (see [page 3](#)). As you can see, someone added the handwritten notes at the bottom and the whole thing was typed on an old typewriter, complete with spelling errors and obvious omissions. To retain the charm and authenticity, the reproduction contains all the original errors.

But was this the kombucha I was looking for? My friend told me she kept it in her refrigerator and had stopped drinking the tea. She also had never heard the word "kombucha," and she couldn't confirm whether her "mushroom" could be the kombucha culture. Remarkably, she did tell me that a biochemist at the University of British Columbia in Vancouver had analyzed this "Manchurian" for the acquaintance who gave it to her. The biochemist had confirmed that the culture was biologically active and contained healthful components, just as the leaflet asserted. I contacted the university in hopes of speaking with the biochemist myself, but I couldn't find him at the time and suspected he had transferred

another university. Nonetheless, I appeared to be on the right track regarding my kombucha research.

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Before long I knew I had been given a true kombucha culture, and as I traced the history of kombucha tea, I discovered that the “Manchurian” wasn’t new at all and was actually quite ancient. Yet, it’s clear that kombucha tea was at times forgotten. Indeed, catastrophic events—such as two world wars—can force people to focus on momentary survival, and at such times, ancient health secrets can be forgotten.

In today’s scientifically advanced world, better hygiene, nutrition, and health care have resulted in ever-increasing longevity. Suddenly, there’s a dire necessity to stay well and productive into our seventies, eighties, nineties, and even our hundreds, and Western governments can no longer afford to provide adequate health care or retirement benefits for aging populations. There’s little wonder that people are searching for ways to take control and maintain their own health while avoiding orthodox or expensive medical treatments. In such circumstances, remedies like kombucha tea seem to come back just in the nick of time. Indeed, the tea can be considered a tonic, taken routinely to bolster good health, rather than as a treatment for any particular disease.

And yet, some practitioners have sworn by the tea in treating certain ailments, including cancer, and this isn’t surprising. While researching alternative treatments for cancer, I noticed that health-bestowing foods containing fermented sauerkraut and fermented juices are extremely important. They’re essential, I realized, not only for those who suffer from cancer but also for all who are delivering health care (in the best sense of that word) to ourselves, our families, our friends, and our neighbors—in short, to all of us. A fermented beverage like kombucha tea is as valuable as these other fermented foods and drinks.

As I stated earlier, this book combines old and new research to best answer any question that you may have about kombucha tea. I invite you to think of this book as a revival of ancient lore. Healers created and used kombucha tea centuries ago. They knew more about the friendly and beneficial coexistence (symbiosis) of microscopic life forms and their influence on human health than even modern researchers.

I began this introduction with a favorite quote from *Alice’s Adventures in Wonderland*. Just as poor Alice becomes lost, I believe humanity has lost many of its health-wise ways over the eons. Also much like Alice, we need someone to remind us from time to time of the good things. Anyone who is familiar with this classic tale knows of the mushroom that Alice ate in response to the caterpillar’s advice. I suppose that, in a way, this book is like the direction-giving caterpillar, and I hope you’ll find it a valuable guide. (Although I advise against smoking the pipe, especially since tobacco smoke can damage the kombucha culture.)



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## Chapter One

# Introducing Kombucha

I received my first kombucha culture from Sandra Poulton in 1995, the year the first edition of this book came out. I lived in Vancouver, British Columbia, and Poulton lived in Lion's Head, Ontario. She secured my kombucha "baby" in a plastic bag, floated it in some kombucha tea, and sent it to me via courier. Two days later, I saw my first kombucha culture.

I'll never forget the great taste experience I had the day my initial batch of kombucha tea was ready. I shut my eyes and kept them tightly closed as I guzzled down the very first glass. I had tasted only the tiniest bit of the cider-like liquid that came with the kombucha culture, so I was totally unprepared to discover that my fresh kombucha tea tasted just like French bubbly.

Although I didn't know it at the time, my first taste of home-brewed kombucha tea was typical. When it has fermented for about seven days and is freshly harvested, the tea tastes like sweet champagne. After it has been stored in the refrigerator, the tea tastes similar to other fermented drinks, such as wine or beer, or nonalcoholic beverages. For example, Poulton, who got her first kombucha culture from a friend, compares the taste to apple cider. Others liken the effervescent tea to cola.

While kombucha tea may remind some users of alcoholic beverages, the tea has very little alcohol (about .5 percent). It also doesn't contain the damaging amount of sugar that is typically found in commercial drinks, and although it contains a small amount of caffeine, it is minimal and comparable to what is in a cup of decaffeinated coffee. Because people generally like a tongue-tingling fizz and sweetness, beverage manufacturers deliver both (and bolster sales) by carbonating commercial drinks and adding excessive amounts of sugar. Most people love sugar and believe they can't live without it, but those who wish to limit their sugar intake have a friend in kombucha tea. The tea is simultaneously refreshing, energizing, and extraordinarily healthful, with no added sweetener necessary. People enjoy drinking it because it's naturally fizzy and tastes great. The tea also soothes the stomach within minutes of drinking it.

If you, like me, enjoy a healthful, thirst-quenching drink, come on board. If you've been searching for a magic potion that's rejuvenating and tastes wonderful, you can end your search today. Kombucha tea will keep you healthy and satisfied, without causing cravings or unwanted side effects.

## FAQ

### **Q: What is the alcohol content of kombucha tea?**

**A:** The amount of alcohol in home-brewed kombucha tea is very low, usually just above .5 percent for teas that have fermented for ten days. The percentage is even lower for teas that have fermented for less time. Teas that are left to ferment longer than ten days have 1 to 2 percent alcohol content. You might think you can increase the alcohol content of the tea by adding more sugar, but don't try it. Adding more sugar will make



the tea too acidic since the alcohol in the tea is converted into vinegar.

## The Living Food You Can Drink

Kombucha tea is a probiotic, which means that it contains living microorganisms that confer health benefit on their host. (*Probiotic* means “for life.”) Kombucha tea, like other living food, also contains acids, enzymes, and vitamins that have been associated with myriad health benefits. The tea is particularly known to aid digestion, boost energy, and strengthen the immune system. (See [chapter 3](#) for more information about the powerful contents of kombucha tea and [chapter 4](#) to explore some of the reported health benefits.)

Kombucha tea is the result of a fermentation process. When the tea is left to ferment for seven days or longer, microbes in the kombucha culture release enzymes that create complex changes. Microbial fermentation is a natural process that has been around for centuries. Ancient people made yogurt and butter using this process, for example. Alcohol is also derived from a fermentation process in which yeast ferments grape juice into wine and barley into beer and whiskey.

So what is kombucha tea composed of? As described in [chapter 5](#), only a few ingredients are needed: the kombucha culture, tea, purified water, and white sugar. By the time the tea is ready to drink, however, very little sugar remains. That’s because the kombucha culture is a colony of helpful bacteria and yeast that grows in a medium of cellulose, and the bacteria and yeast consume and convert the sugar during fermentation. (The kombucha culture is similar to a yogurt culture or kefir culture that ferments in milk.)

The kombucha culture looks like a pancake or mushroom. In fact, mainly for the sake of convenience, the kombucha culture is often called a mushroom. It does, after all, look like a “mushroom,” or grow quickly, so it’s aptly named, although a kombucha isn’t really a mushroom in the proper biological sense. Those who wish to avoid the term “mushroom” refer to the culture as a “SCOBY,” which is an acronym for “symbiotic colony of bacteria and yeast.”

The symbiotic partners profit from each other. The yeast delivers the food that the bacteria need to grow, and the bacteria protect the yeast. On their own, neither could continue to exist for long. Here’s an overview of the process: During fermentation, the yeast cells in the kombucha culture busily feed on the nutrients provided by the sugar and the tea. As a result of this metabolism, the yeast cells change the sugar to ethyl alcohol (ethanol) and carbon dioxide. The bacteria begin to flourish and convert the alcohol into acetic acid, or vinegar, and other organic acids. The kombucha tea is increasingly soured, and the alcohol acts as a poison for disease-causing germs, which can’t survive in the tea.

Meanwhile, the bacteria change the sugar into cellulose. This process allows the kombucha culture floating on top of the tea to grow, and a second kombucha culture takes shape. So every time you ferment a batch of kombucha tea, the original kombucha culture, sometimes referred to as the kombucha “mother,” gives birth to a baby that you can use yourself or pass along to a friend or family member who may be interested in the benefits of kombucha tea.

Kombucha tea has traditionally been brewed at home by people who have enjoyed its taste along with its ability to quench thirst and bolster health. Today, kombucha tea and related products are also widely available from commercial manufacturers. If you’re not yet ready

make kombucha tea yourself, go to the local natural food store and sample some of the products you find there. (See [chapter 6](#) for my impressions about some of the commercial brews that are currently available.)

## **Praised by Users**

I first heard about kombucha tea from my friend Waltraut Schaffer, who brought it from Germany and made it to treat her digestive troubles. According to Schaffer, her digestion promptly improved after she began drinking kombucha tea. Initially, she was a little concerned about the sugar in the tea, but as we now know, after fermentation, very little sugar remains in the tea.

Sandra Poulton, who gave me my first kombucha baby, drinks kombucha tea mainly to keep up her program of preventive health care. She says, “I drink kombucha for its health bestowing properties. I have a general concern to stay healthy.” She adds, “I don’t have any major problems right now, and I don’t want any!”

Like Poulton, I was initially interested in kombucha tea for maintaining health. Fermenting kombucha tea for longer times dramatically improves this potential but also intensifies the flavor. As Poulton cautions, “The taste might be a bit overwhelming for newcomers to kombucha because it can be quite sharp. Yet, if you can drink apple cider vinegar, you can drink kombucha tea.”

In the book *Kombucha Phenomenon*, writers Betsy Pryor and Sanford Holst flood readers with impressive testimonials from kombucha drinkers from all over the United States. I heard Pryor speak in Las Vegas, Nevada, during a National Nutritional Foods Association convention. Pryor related how, at age forty-nine, she lost fourteen pounds after drinking kombucha tea for two months. Though she didn’t work out much, her muscles became firmer. Then after one year of drinking kombucha tea, she noticed her gray hairs were regaining color. When she had been drinking kombucha tea for two years, her hair thickened and was longer than ever. In addition, she reported sleeping less but being more focused. She also noticed that she was developing a photographic memory. All sound like good reasons for kombucha tea to become the drink of choice for some Hollywood actors, whom Pryor says use it instead of artificial stimulants to sustain them through grueling sixteen-hour workdays.

Attendees of Pryor’s presentation offered their own testimonials, discussing what they gained from drinking kombucha tea. Here are some typical comments:

“My complexion cleared up.”

“I’ve lost weight. I just want to eat less.”

“I have better digestion, and I really feel it has helped my liver.”

“I sleep less but more soundly. And I have more energy throughout the day.”

“It helps me with my menopause. It just balances me through the hot flashes—I’m just sliding through it.”

One attendee discussed how her son, who works in construction, uses the tea to quench his thirst on hot days: “My son says he can drink a full glass of kombucha tea on the job and have his thirst quenched, or he can drink a gallon of water and feel terrible afterward. Another mother noted that her twenty-six-year-old son is using the tea to combat baldness. “I’ve had my son on it now about four months. He told me, ‘Mom, I’m getting hair! My hair is coming back!’”

I came across one additional testimonial that I'd like to include here. In the Dutch magazine *Op Zoek*, a fifteen-year-old boy from the Netherlands recalled his experience with kombucha tea: "The misery began when I was ten years old, and it lasted four years. At first the itching began in my arms, and I scratched them till they bled, especially in bed at night. After several weeks I went to the doctor. I was given a course of penicillin and ointment, because one arm was inflamed from the scratching. This lasted for about a year and a half. I kept getting more ointment, one lot after the other, and it was the same with the penicillin. Finally, I had to go to a hospital specialist. The doctor talked about some intestinal bacteria that were the cause of the trouble. Then I was given more medicine, which made me feel numb, but the itching remained . . . but now my mother's been making kombucha tea for the past six months. I began drinking it right away, and after only one week the itching was gone. I feel as if I've been born again. Even the scars are hardly visible anymore. I'd like to tell everybody to stop taking medicine and drink kombucha."

## **Prescribed by Professionals**

In addition to hearing from the users of kombucha tea, I spoke with professionals who recommend the tea to their clients. Wanting to learn more about its practical applications, I discussed kombucha tea with Bonnie Mori, who is an acupuncturist, certified herbalist, and a student of Chinese medicine in Niagara-on-the-Lake, Ontario. She says, "Besides drinking kombucha regularly myself, I prescribe kombucha tea to my clients for many conditions and, invariably, they meet with success. I have also recommended it to my entire family and friends for various digestive ailments, including constipation, belching, and gas, and for lack of energy. I have even given the tea to my cats and dogs, and I find that they're less prone to infections."

Mori describes some of the positive effects of kombucha tea: "I have given it to a client with diabetes to treat her diarrhea. It worked and she even obtained some desired weight loss. I also know of at least one person who, besides drinking it regularly, used kombucha tea as a natural astringent. This person successfully combated acne and claims to have less oily hair." Mori also recounts a story about another case she treated with kombucha tea: "This fellow burped all night and couldn't sleep a wink. The burping stopped, and he sleeps like a baby."

Mori says that it's typical for clients who use kombucha tea to comment that they look younger than ever. She adds that those who use the tea also confirm having much more energy. As Mori puts it, "Some people get instantaneously more energy after drinking kombucha tea, and that energy is sustained for the rest of the day. For instance, I gave the tea to a top corporate manager who is living in my area. He likes to play hockey as a counterbalance to his sedentary occupation, but his game had slackened off. Now he has enough energy for two games."

Mori thinks kombucha tea acts as a catalyst in the body, causing numerous beneficial changes over time. She says the energizing effect that people notice almost immediately is due to the amino acids and the vitamins in the tea, which are instantaneously absorbed.

Many of Mori's clients are a bit sheepish about adopting a kombucha baby and starting to brew the tea at home. Because they're afraid of other people's reactions or opinions, they say, "I can't believe that I'm taking this home!" However, once they start drinking the tea and are experiencing the health benefits, they're hooked. Over time, they even begin to pass along the tea to their family, friends, and neighbors.

Kombucha tea has also found acceptance in the well-respected discipline of homeopathy. Alex Lauder of Guelph, Ontario, is a homeopathic practitioner who uses kombucha tea in his practice. Lauder recommends kombucha tea to his patients mainly as an adjunct to a multidisciplinary homeopathic program for cancer treatment. Lauder says, “As part of the program and whenever patients need antioxidants, I suggest kombucha tea. I know of cases in which remission occurred that could only be ascribed to the kombucha. We have seen lumps disappear from under the skin of kombucha users.”

Lauder emphasizes that he provides the kombucha tea free of charge to his patients and that there’s no profit motive involved in his kombucha treatment. Kombucha tea can be made at low cost. With the possible exception of commercial manufacturers (see [chapter 6](#)), nobody makes a fortune off kombucha tea. To me, this fact underscores its genuine usefulness as a remedy.

Lauder says his wife drinks kombucha tea and also uses it regularly on her face. He confirms that her skin looks younger than ever and that her facial lines have disappeared.

## **Known in Military and Athletic Circles**

According to writer and researcher Harald Tietze, members of the Russian military are regularly given kombucha tea to drink. He also reports that kombucha tea usage has been studied by the German military. Under the direction of Simon Gerrit, researchers at the military-operated sports school concluded, “Pure biological kombucha fermented tea has a strengthening effect and improves the performance of the athletes.”

Additional research results from Germany confirm that drinking kombucha tea can be a benefit to athletes. At the Olympic training ground in Warendorf, researchers tested twelve trained athletes who drank about seven fluid ounces (about 200 milliliters) of kombucha tea per day. Blood tests confirmed that the athletes achieved better training times after consuming the kombucha tea. The athletes also felt more energetic and recovered more quickly when they drank kombucha tea. The researchers concluded that drinking kombucha tea led to positive changes in the energy metabolism of the cells, which could explain the increased physical abilities and enhanced well-being the athletes experienced. The use of kombucha tea among athletes has been observed in other parts of Europe as well. In Russia, for example, trainers give kombucha tea to high-performance athletes to increase their energy output.

There have even been reports in European health magazines about kombucha tea being given to camels that are used for racing in Arab countries. The total composition of the camel “dope,” however, was kept a proprietary secret.

## **A Healthful Thirst Quencher for Children**

Rosina Fasching, perhaps the most famous kombucha researcher and writer, and a number of other researchers recommend kombucha tea as a drink for children. Fasching’s only caution is that kombucha tea usually contains a bit of caffeine, which could stimulate children. To make kombucha tea more palatable for youngsters, it can easily be diluted with their favorite fruit juice or water.

# Kombucha Tea and the Future

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When I moved into a new home some years back, I discovered a stone sculpture in the otherwise empty house. The sculpture depicted the number one hundred. I was delighted because the year of the move was also the year of my fiftieth birthday. I interpreted the sculpture as a positive sign that I'll reach the age of one hundred, when I plan to be traveling, gardening, and writing my memoirs. I'm hopeful that drinking kombucha tea will help me attain these goals. After all, drinking the tea is already famously associated with longevity in the Kargasok region of Russia (where it's called "Kargasok tea"). The people there drink the tea throughout their lives.

While drinking kombucha tea has long been a tradition in the Kargasok region, I wouldn't be surprised if it became a much more common practice around the globe. As the population increases and the world's resources are stretched, rediscovering ancient methods of food preparation will no doubt become increasingly more important. Fermented beverages, such as kombucha tea and kefir, are now accepted in the mainstream as healthful drinks, and they may become much more prevalent in the future.

Although we still await scientific explanations about the healing properties of kombucha tea, there are two important points to remember. First, testimonials clearly indicate that kombucha tea aids digestion and detoxification, increasing overall energy. Second, kombucha tea provides an inexpensive and delicious alternative to alcoholic and carbonated beverages which are loaded with sugar and preservatives. With kombucha tea in hand, we'll be able to face the future with enthusiasm and cheer.



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## Chapter Two

# Kombucha's Illustrious Past and Promise

Although we don't know exactly how or where the kombucha culture originated, all signs point to the East. According to author Günther Frank, the first recorded use of kombucha tea was in ancient China. In the year 221 BC, during the Tsin Dynasty, kombucha was hailed as "the tea of immortality." Today, the tea remains a favorite folk remedy in China. Research by Sergio Rollan, a medical doctor, research biologist, and nutritionist associated with Kefiplant, also suggests that kombucha came from the Far East, probably China. Another possible point of origin is Caucasia, the region where Asia and Europe meet, between the Black and Caspian Seas.

Author Betsy Pryor holds that the kombucha culture may have originated in the Middle East and made its way to Europe and America via the Far East. She believes kombucha contains some lichen, a source of antibacterial usnic acid, which is a major constituent of manna according to some theories. Described in the Bible as feeding the children of Israel, manna is known as "food from heaven." Pryor suggests that kombucha was carried along the traditional spice routes that existed between the Mediterranean and the Far East. Kombucha tea would have been a popular beverage because it took months for caravans to traverse the route, and travelers would have needed fermented foods that wouldn't spoil.

Over the years, there has been debate not only about where the kombucha culture came from, but also about what it is. According to Helmut Golz, a German physician who has written a book about kombucha, the culture was once thought to be a sponge that was fished from the sea; its curative properties were ascribed to its iodine content. Others, including researchers from the Central Bacteriological Institute in Moscow, declared the kombucha culture to be a lichen. A symbiosis of algae and fungi, lichens originated some 2.5 million years ago. However, while lichens are recognized for their healing properties, they require light for photosynthesis, whereas the kombucha culture happily grows in total darkness. As we now know, Western science has established the kombucha culture to be neither a lichen nor a sponge, but rather a symbiosis of bacteria and yeast cells.

## **Kombucha Arrives in the West**

By the turn of the twentieth century, kombucha had traveled west from Mongolia and Russia and became known in other parts of Europe. In 1913, sources described kombucha for the first time in German literature. A kombucha coming from Russia was discussed: "The [culture] employed it against all kind of ailments."

Kombucha tea has had a steady presence in Russia, where the home-brewed drink continues to thrive as a folk remedy today. The kombucha culture was also used to make popular kvass, a sour beer-like beverage made of rye meal, malt, and other ingredients including spices. From Russia, the kvass made its way into Poland during World War I. Records mention a Polish apothecary who prepared a laxative based on a "Russian secret recipe." By 1914, residents of Prague had heard of kombucha tea. After World War I, kombucha tea made a comeback first in Denmark and then in the German province of East

Prussia. Returning German prisoners of war carried the kombucha culture to Stettin and Saxony. By 1927, some people in Westphalia and Hamburg knew kombucha tea as a home remedy.

Following World War II, kombucha tea became known primarily in Italy but also in France and Spain. Surprisingly, it had clearly been forgotten in Germany at that time. We don't know why kombucha tea has gone through periods of relative renown and obscurity; my theory is that people forgot kombucha because of the pressing business of daily survival. It's also possible that the tradition of brewing kombucha tea died out during the war years and afterward because so many staples, including sugar, were rationed. At the time, who could afford to feed precious sugar to a symbiotic culture?

By the 1960s, kombucha tea saw a renaissance in Germany through the work of Rudolf Sklenar, a medical practitioner who used the tea extensively to treat cancer patients. Sklenar also prescribed the tea for metabolic disorders, rheumatism, gout, high blood pressure, high cholesterol, and diabetes. He recorded various successes in these areas but was particularly concerned about cancer. He frowned upon orthodox cancer treatments, such as surgery and chemotherapy, and preferred biological therapies for prevention and healing. Apparently, Sklenar's method was also practiced by Veronika Carstens, a medical doctor who was married to the former West German president. In her writings from the 1980s, Carstens mentioned kombucha tea.

## A Kombucha by Any Other Name

The word kombucha is said to be derived from the Japanese terms "kombu" (brown algae) and "cha" (tea). Another theory is that the name refers to a Korean physician by the name of Kombu, who allegedly treated the Japanese Emperor Inkyo with the cultured tea as long ago as 415 AD.

My own research revealed more than one hundred terms in multiple languages that refer to the kombucha culture and tea. Examples include algae fungus, Indian wine fungus, Japanese sponge, Manchurian mushroom, and many others. Kombucha must have impressed folks all over the world to have earned such fanciful names. I believe this proliferation of names in and of itself is a good indication of the tea's true worth. If it had not tasted so refreshing, if it had not worked to restore health, I suspect kombucha tea wouldn't have garnered so many appellations.

## Kombucha in Practice and Research

Even though the spotlight hasn't always been on kombucha, the tea was steadily used and studied by a number of European scientists and physicians during the early decades of the twentieth century. Author Günther Frank tells us that by 1914, a researcher named Bacinskaya found the beverage effective in regulating the intestinal tract. Frank also reports that in 1917, Rudolf Kobert recalled an infallible cure for rheumatism prepared from the kombucha culture, and Wilhelm Henneberg found that Russian tea kvass combated "all kinds of illness, especially constipation."

In 1927, a researcher writing in *Biological Method of Healing* reported that the kombucha



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