HOME

Why Are People Spending $50 on Gut Supplements When This $3 Food Exists?

By bestfolkmedicine · 27/10/2026 · 14 min read



Could one of the simplest foods in your kitchen help support your digestive system? Sauerkraut has been prepared for centuries using little more than cabbage and salt. Today, researchers are exploring how this traditional fermented food interacts with gut bacteria, digestion, and overall health—and why its benefits may extend beyond the probiotics everyone talks about.

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What if improving your diet didn’t require another expensive supplement?

What if one of the most interesting foods for gut health was something your grandparents already knew how to make?

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Sauerkraut—fermented cabbage—has been part of traditional diets across Europe for generations.

It is inexpensive, simple to prepare, naturally rich in plant compounds, and can contain living microorganisms produced during fermentation.

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Yet it is often overlooked in favor of probiotic capsules, expensive gut-health powders, and heavily marketed wellness products.

But there is an important question.

Can fermented cabbage really improve your digestion, or has the internet exaggerated its benefits?

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Scientific research suggests sauerkraut may offer several advantages as part of a balanced diet. However, it is not a proven laxative, a treatment for every digestive disorder, or a replacement for medical care.

The real story is more interesting than the hype.

1. What Exactly Happens When Cabbage Ferments?

Sauerkraut begins with two basic ingredients: fresh cabbage and salt.

When cabbage is shredded and mixed with the correct amount of salt, moisture is drawn from its cells.

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This creates a salty liquid known as brine.

The cabbage is then kept submerged in the brine, allowing naturally present microorganisms to ferment the vegetable.

During fermentation, lactic acid bacteria consume some of the natural sugars found in cabbage.

They produce lactic acid, which gradually lowers the acidity of the surrounding environment.

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This transformation gives sauerkraut its characteristic sour taste.

The acidic environment also helps preserve the cabbage by restricting the growth of many undesirable microorganisms.

Several bacterial groups can participate in the fermentation process, including species associated with Leuconostoc, Lactobacillus, and related genera.

As fermentation progresses, the microbial community changes.

The result is a preserved vegetable with a flavor, texture, and chemical composition different from fresh cabbage.

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Unlike vegetables pickled directly in vinegar, traditional sauerkraut develops its acidity primarily through microbial fermentation.

2. Why Your Gut Microbiome Matters

Your digestive tract is home to trillions of microorganisms.

These bacteria, viruses, fungi, and other microbes collectively form the gut microbiome.

They participate in numerous biological processes, including food fermentation, nutrient metabolism, and interactions with the immune system.

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Some gut bacteria break down dietary fibers that the human body cannot digest on its own.

Through fermentation, they produce compounds known as short-chain fatty acids.

These compounds are involved in intestinal health and metabolic regulation.

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A diverse, stable gut microbiome is generally associated with several aspects of good health.

However, there is no single ideal microbial composition shared by every healthy person.

Diet, medications, age, environment, and individual biology all influence the microbiome.

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Fermented foods are being studied because they may introduce microorganisms and fermentation-derived compounds into the digestive system.

Sauerkraut is one example.

3. Is Sauerkraut Really a Natural Probiotic?

Fresh, unpasteurized sauerkraut can contain living lactic acid bacteria.

However, there is an important distinction between a food containing live microorganisms and a clinically established probiotic.

The scientific definition of a probiotic requires that specific live microorganisms provide demonstrated health benefits when consumed in adequate quantities.

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Not every microorganism found in fermented cabbage has been shown to produce a particular health benefit.

Furthermore, bacterial strains and quantities vary between sauerkraut products.

Factors such as salt concentration, fermentation temperature, storage conditions, and pasteurization can influence microbial content.

That means one jar of sauerkraut may be quite different from another.

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Refrigerated, unpasteurized sauerkraut often contains live microorganisms.

Shelf-stable sauerkraut that has been heat-treated may contain few or no living bacteria.

Nevertheless, pasteurized sauerkraut can still provide fiber and fermentation-derived compounds.

The presence of live bacteria is interesting, but it does not automatically make sauerkraut a clinically proven probiotic treatment.

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4. What Research Actually Says About Sauerkraut and Gut Health

Researchers have begun examining what happens when people eat sauerkraut regularly.

A 2025 crossover intervention trial involving 87 healthy adults investigated the effects of consuming fresh or pasteurized sauerkraut daily for four weeks.

The study found changes in certain bacterial species in the gut microbiome.

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However, the researchers also observed that the overall gut microbial community was relatively resistant to short-term dietary changes.

Interestingly, some changes were more pronounced in participants consuming pasteurized sauerkraut.

This suggests that the health effects of fermented cabbage may not depend entirely on whether the food contains living bacteria.

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A separate 2026 investigation involving the same number of healthy participants evaluated inflammatory markers, blood pressure, glucose regulation, and markers related to intestinal permeability.

Researchers observed a small reduction in systolic blood pressure and modest changes in certain biological markers.

However, they did not detect an improvement in measured intestinal-barrier integrity.

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The investigators concluded that four weeks of daily sauerkraut consumption did not produce substantial overall systemic health benefits in healthy adults.

These findings help establish a realistic picture.

Sauerkraut is a useful food to include in a varied diet, but evidence supporting dramatic medical benefits remains limited.

5. Can Sauerkraut Help With Constipation?

This is one of the most popular claims surrounding fermented cabbage.

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Sauerkraut is sometimes described online as a living laxative.

But that description is misleading.

A laxative is a substance that helps promote bowel movements through a particular physiological mechanism.

Sauerkraut is a fermented vegetable, not a standardized laxative medication.

Cabbage provides dietary fiber, which can help support regular bowel movements as part of an adequate overall fiber intake.

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However, sauerkraut is not exceptionally high in fiber compared with foods such as beans, lentils, oats, or certain seeds.

Additionally, fermented foods may affect digestive symptoms differently between individuals.

Some people tolerate sauerkraut well.

Others experience gas, bloating, or abdominal discomfort.

In the 2025 trial involving healthy adults, researchers did not observe significant improvements in stool frequency or stool consistency after four weeks of sauerkraut consumption.

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Therefore, describing sauerkraut as a guaranteed remedy for constipation is not supported by the available evidence.

For persistent constipation, adequate dietary fiber, hydration, physical activity, and evaluation of underlying causes are generally more important than relying on a single fermented food.

6. Could Sauerkraut Help People With IBS?

Irritable bowel syndrome is a common digestive condition associated with symptoms such as abdominal discomfort, bloating, constipation, and diarrhea.

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The gut microbiome is one area of interest in IBS research.

A small Norwegian study involving 34 people with IBS investigated the effects of consuming pasteurized or unpasteurized sauerkraut over six weeks.

Both groups reported improvements in gastrointestinal symptoms.

However, the study was relatively small, and the results did not establish that live bacteria were responsible for the improvement.

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Larger studies are necessary before sauerkraut can be recommended as an established IBS treatment.

It is also important to recognize that cabbage contains fermentable carbohydrates.

For some individuals with IBS, these carbohydrates can contribute to gas and bloating.

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This means sauerkraut may be tolerated well by one person while worsening symptoms in another.

Starting with a small serving may help determine personal tolerance.

7. Seven Potential Benefits of Including Sauerkraut in Your Diet

Although sauerkraut should not be treated as a miracle cure, it offers several practical nutritional advantages.

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1. It Provides Dietary Fiber

Cabbage contains fiber that supports normal digestive function.

Dietary fiber contributes to stool bulk and can support a healthy intestinal environment.

2. It Can Contain Live Microorganisms

Unpasteurized sauerkraut may contain living lactic acid bacteria produced during fermentation.

Their specific health effects depend on the microorganisms involved and the individual consuming them.

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3. It Provides Vitamin C

Cabbage naturally contains vitamin C, which contributes to normal immune function and collagen synthesis.

The amount present after fermentation depends on preparation and storage conditions.

4. It Contains Plant Compounds

Cabbage belongs to the cruciferous vegetable family.

It contains glucosinolates and other phytochemicals that are being investigated for their potential biological effects.

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5. It Adds Variety to the Diet

Eating a diverse range of plant foods can help provide different fibers and nutrients.

Sauerkraut is one way to include fermented vegetables alongside fresh produce.

6. It May Support Dietary Enjoyment

Its distinctive sour flavor can make meals more interesting without requiring complicated ingredients.

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Enjoyable foods are often easier to include consistently in a balanced eating pattern.

7. It Is Affordable and Easy to Prepare

Homemade sauerkraut requires only cabbage, salt, suitable equipment, and time.

It can be an economical addition to meals.

However, homemade fermentation must follow reliable food-safety procedures.

8. The Truth About the Viral 7-Day Sauerkraut Recipe

Social media posts frequently claim that cabbage can be fermented for seven days and immediately become a powerful gut-health remedy.

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But there is a problem with this claim.

Seven days is not a universally reliable fermentation period for fully fermented, safely preserved sauerkraut.

According to the National Center for Home Food Preservation, sauerkraut fermented at approximately 70–75°F (21–24°C) generally requires three to four weeks to complete fermentation.

At cooler temperatures, fermentation can take five to six weeks.

ezstandalone.cmd.push(function () { ezstandalone.showAds(156); });
The exact timing depends on several factors, including temperature, salt concentration, cabbage characteristics, and fermentation conditions.

During the first week, the cabbage may begin bubbling and developing a sour aroma.

That means fermentation is underway.

It does not necessarily mean the process is complete.

For reliable results, beginners should follow a tested fermentation recipe rather than assuming seven days is sufficient.

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9. How to Make Traditional Homemade Sauerkraut With Just Two Ingredients

One of the greatest attractions of sauerkraut is its simplicity.

You do not need special probiotic powders, expensive starter cultures, or complicated ingredients.

Traditional sauerkraut relies on the microorganisms naturally present on cabbage.

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Ingredients

- 5 pounds (approximately 2.27 kg) fresh, firm green cabbage
- 3 tablespoons canning or pickling salt, following the tested USDA recipe

Use a suitable food-grade fermentation container, a clean weight to keep the cabbage submerged, and an appropriate cover that allows fermentation gases to escape.

Step 1: Prepare the Cabbage

Remove damaged outer leaves.

Rinse the cabbage thoroughly under cool running water.

Cut it into quarters and remove the hard core.

Shred the remaining cabbage into thin strips.

Step 2: Add the Salt

Place the shredded cabbage into a large, clean bowl.

Add the measured salt and distribute it evenly.

Using clean hands, mix and squeeze the cabbage until it begins releasing liquid.

Salt draws moisture from the cabbage and helps create conditions favorable for lactic acid fermentation.

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Do not arbitrarily reduce the salt in a tested recipe, because the amount influences fermentation safety.

Step 3: Pack the Cabbage

Transfer the salted cabbage into a suitable fermentation container.

Press it firmly to remove trapped air pockets.

The cabbage should release enough liquid to become submerged in its own brine.

If additional liquid is necessary, follow a tested recipe for preparing supplemental brine rather than adding plain water.

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Step 4: Keep Everything Submerged

Place a clean fermentation weight over the cabbage.

Ensure the shredded vegetables remain beneath the liquid.

This is important because exposed cabbage can develop unwanted surface growth.

Use an appropriate fermentation lid or cover that allows gases to escape.

Do not seal an ordinary jar tightly without a safe way to release accumulating pressure.

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Step 5: Allow Fermentation to Progress

Keep the container at approximately 70–75°F (21–24°C).

At these temperatures, traditional sauerkraut generally takes three to four weeks to ferment fully.

Fermentation may take longer in cooler conditions.

Check the preparation according to the instructions for your particular container and fermentation method.

Discard the batch if it develops visible mold, a slimy texture, or an unpleasant rotten odor.

ezstandalone.cmd.push(function () { ezstandalone.showAds(162); });
Never taste suspicious fermented food to determine whether it is safe.

Step 6: Refrigerate and Enjoy

Once fermentation is complete, transfer the sauerkraut to appropriate clean containers if necessary and refrigerate it.

Keep it properly stored and use clean utensils when serving.

ezstandalone.cmd.push(function () { ezstandalone.showAds(163); });
For shelf-stable storage, use a tested canning procedure rather than simply leaving finished sauerkraut at room temperature.

Heating and canning can reduce or eliminate living microorganisms, although the resulting sauerkraut can still provide other nutritional components.

10. How Much Sauerkraut Should You Eat?

There is no scientifically established daily serving of sauerkraut that guarantees improved gut health.

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For people unfamiliar with fermented vegetables, starting with one or two tablespoons alongside a meal is a reasonable practical approach.

If it is well tolerated, the serving can gradually increase.

Some studies have investigated daily amounts of approximately 100 grams, but that does not mean everyone needs to consume that quantity.

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People who experience significant bloating, abdominal discomfort, or diarrhea may need to reduce their intake.

Those with medically prescribed sodium restrictions should also consider that traditional sauerkraut can contain substantial amounts of salt.

The best serving is one that fits your dietary needs and digestive tolerance.

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11. Who Should Be Careful With Sauerkraut?

Although sauerkraut is a traditional food enjoyed by many people, it may not be suitable in large amounts for everyone.

People with high blood pressure or sodium restrictions: Traditional sauerkraut can contain considerable sodium. Portion sizes and overall daily sodium intake matter.

People with IBS or sensitive digestion: Fermented cabbage can trigger gas or bloating in some individuals.

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People with histamine intolerance: Fermented foods may contain varying amounts of histamine and other biogenic amines, which some sensitive people report reacting to.

People taking certain medications: Those taking monoamine oxidase inhibitors should discuss fermented foods with their prescribing clinician because of potential dietary tyramine restrictions.

People with weakened immune systems: Extra caution is appropriate with unpasteurized, homemade fermented foods, particularly when preparation or storage conditions are uncertain.

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Safe preparation matters more than following a popular social-media recipe.

12. Sauerkraut vs. Probiotic Supplements: Which Is Better?

The comparison is not as simple as a price tag.

A jar of homemade sauerkraut may cost only a few dollars.

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A probiotic supplement can cost considerably more.

But that does not mean sauerkraut is automatically more effective.

Probiotic supplements may contain specific microorganisms at measured doses.

Some particular strains have been investigated for defined clinical purposes.

Sauerkraut contains a changing mixture of microorganisms, with composition varying between batches.

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The two are therefore not directly interchangeable.

For an otherwise healthy adult looking to add variety to a balanced diet, sauerkraut can be an affordable choice.

For someone considering a probiotic for a particular medical condition, the evidence must be evaluated for the specific strain and intended purpose.

Neither fermented cabbage nor an expensive probiotic supplement should be assumed to cure digestive disorders.

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13. Is Homemade Sauerkraut Better Than Store-Bought?

It depends on what you are looking for.

Homemade sauerkraut allows greater control over ingredients and preparation.

It can also be inexpensive.

However, safe home fermentation requires correct measurements, appropriate equipment, and careful handling.

Commercial products have their own advantages, including standardized manufacturing and convenience.

Some refrigerated sauerkraut products contain living microorganisms.

Others are pasteurized.

Pasteurization reduces microbial activity, but it does not automatically eliminate all nutritional value.

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A pasteurized product can still provide fiber and other cabbage-derived compounds.

The most useful approach is to read the ingredients and choose a product appropriate for your nutritional needs.

14. Could Eating Sauerkraut Every Day Transform Your Gut?

The idea of transforming the gut microbiome with one inexpensive food is appealing.

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But the available evidence does not support dramatic promises.

In controlled research, regular sauerkraut consumption has produced some measurable biological changes.

However, those changes have not consistently translated into substantial improvements in digestive function or general health.

The gut microbiome is influenced by the entire diet, not one ingredient.

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Consuming diverse plant foods, adequate fiber, and an appropriate balance of nutrients remains important.

Regular physical activity, adequate sleep, and avoiding unnecessary antibiotic use also support broader health.

Sauerkraut may be one useful addition to this pattern.

It is not a substitute for it.

Final Thoughts: The Simplest Foods Sometimes Deserve a Second Look

Sauerkraut has survived centuries of changing food trends for good reasons.

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It is affordable.

It is flavorful.

It can be prepared using only two basic ingredients.

And when properly fermented, it can provide a distinctive combination of plant nutrients, fiber, and fermentation-derived compounds.

Modern research is exploring how these characteristics influence the gut microbiome and human health.

The findings are interesting, although far less dramatic than many online claims suggest.

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Sauerkraut is not a magical laxative.

It has not been proven superior to expensive probiotic supplements.

And seven days is not a reliable universal timeline for completing traditional fermentation.

But none of those limitations make this humble food uninteresting.

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In a world filled with increasingly complicated wellness products, fermented cabbage is a reminder that nutritious foods do not always need elaborate processing or expensive marketing.

Sometimes the most useful addition to your diet is not a new supplement. It is a traditional food prepared carefully and enjoyed as part of a balanced lifestyle.

Would you try making sauerkraut at home with just cabbage and salt?

ezstandalone.cmd.push(function () { ezstandalone.showAds(178); });
Or have you been eating homemade fermented cabbage for years?

Share your experience in the comments. Does your family have a traditional sauerkraut recipe passed down through generations?

Read online: https://bestfolkmedicine.com/2026/10/sauerkraut-gut-health-benefits-homemade-recipe/

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