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### **Kefir: Tangy, Tasty, and Packs a Powerful Health Punch**

I am currently teaching a Stay Strong, Stay Healthy series in Seneca. These classes focus on strength training for adults age 60 and older. Along with exercise, we often discuss a variety of health topics. During one of our recent sessions, gut health came up in the conversation. We hear so much about how important gut health is to our overall well-being. A few weeks ago, I wrote an article about gut health in general. This week, I would like to highlight one of my favorite foods for supporting a healthy gut: kefir. You will often find kefir in the dairy section of your grocery store. Kefir is a fermented milk beverage with a tangy flavor that has been enjoyed for centuries in parts of Eastern Europe and Asia. It is made by combining milk with kefir grains, which contain beneficial bacteria and yeasts. I think of kefir as a drinkable yogurt, although it typically contains a greater variety of probiotics, the healthy microorganisms that help support gut health.

Kefir can help maintain a healthy gut microbiome, which plays an important role in digestion, nutrient absorption, and overall health. A balanced gut microbiome may help reduce digestive discomfort and support healthy bowel function.

In addition to its probiotic benefits, kefir is packed with important nutrients. It provides calcium, phosphorus, protein, vitamin B12, riboflavin, magnesium, and vitamin D. These nutrients support many body functions, including maintaining strong bones, promoting energy production, and supporting overall health. A typical cup of plain, low-fat kefir contains about 9 grams of protein, making it a satisfying snack or a nutritious addition to a meal.

There are many ways to enjoy kefir. Try adding it to smoothies, pouring it over cereal, mixing it into overnight oats, or using it as a base for salad dressings. Of course, many people enjoy drinking it straight from the glass.

When purchasing kefir, take a moment to compare nutrition labels. Look for products that list active live cultures, either on the label or in the ingredient list. Keep in mind that flavored varieties often contain more carbohydrates and added sugars than plain kefir. If you are new to kefir, start with a small amount and gradually increase your intake over time as your digestive system adjusts.

Kefir is a nutritious addition to a healthy eating plan and offers many potential benefits. While no single food can meet all of your nutritional needs, kefir is a simple and delicious way to support good gut health and overall wellness.