What do we know about the value of consuming live dietary microbes?

- Fermented foods are thought to support gut health
- Fermented foods are associated with improved cardiovascular and metabolic health
- Probiotics, which are live microbes of many different species, can improve some health parameters
- There remains much to learn:
  - How many live microbes should we consume for a health benefit?
  - Are some microbes better than others for our health?
  - What types of health benefits could we expect?

How many microbes do we eat?

NHANES is a nationally representative data set that contains information on what Americans eat. A recent study using this data showed:

- Approximately one in three adults only consume foods with low levels of live microbes
- Diets that include foods with medium ($10^4$–$10^7$ CFU/g) or high ($>10^7$ CFU/g) levels of live microbes as compared to those with lower levels of live microbes were linked with reduced systolic blood pressure and waistline size.
- What foods would provide a consumer with high levels of microbes? You could consume one 200g serving of yogurt, 75g of fresh fruit, and a 125g serving of fresh uncooked vegetables.

Is consuming live microbes safe?

- Many microbes are beneficial or simply pass through the consumer without an impact
- Some also cause food spoilage
- But some microbes can cause serious illness – such as Salmonella or Campylobacter – and these need to be avoided
- Keep in mind that eating certain undercooked or raw foods – such as milk, fish, meat – can pose a health risk

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