

Fermented Foods Linked to Decreased Social Anxiety

By [Traci Pedersen](#)



Young adults who eat fermented foods tend to have fewer symptoms of social anxiety than those who don't — most likely due to the large amount of probiotics in these dishes, according to a new study to be published in the journal *Psychiatry Research*. The link is particularly strong among those at genetic risk for social anxiety disorder.

“It is likely that the probiotics in the fermented foods are favorably changing the environment in the gut, and changes in the gut in turn influence social anxiety,” said researcher Matthew Hilimire, a professor of psychology at the College of William & Mary.

“I think that it is absolutely fascinating that the microorganisms in your gut can influence your mind.”

For the study, the researchers developed a questionnaire that was included in a mass testing tool administered in the university's Introduction to Psychology courses during the fall 2014 semester; about 700 students participated.

http://psychcentral.com/news/2015/06/12/fermented-foods-linked-to-decreased-social-anxiety/85640.html#at_pco=tst-1.0&at_si=55801bede8d2dec2&at_ab=per-2&at_pos=1&at_tot=2

In the questionnaire, students were asked about their intake of fermented foods over the previous 30 days; it also asked about exercise frequency and their average consumption of fruits and vegetables so that the researchers could control for healthy habits outside of fermented food intake, said Hilimire.

“The main finding was that individuals who had consumed more fermented foods had reduced social anxiety but that was qualified by an interaction by neuroticism. What that means is that that relationship was strongest amongst people that were high in neuroticism,” Hilimire said.

They found that exercise is associated with lower levels of social anxiety as well. The study is just the first in a series designed to explore the mind-gut connection, including another examination of the data to see whether a correlation exists between fermented food intake and autism symptoms, said Hilimire.

“This study shows that young adults who are prone towards anxiety report less social anxiety if they frequently consume fermented foods with probiotics.

“These initial results highlight the possibility that social anxiety may be alleviated through low-risk nutritional interventions, although further research is needed to determine whether increasing probiotic consumption directly causes a reduction in social anxiety,” said Assistant Professor Jordan DeVlyder at the University of Maryland School of Social Work.

Soon, the researchers will conduct an additional experiment version of the study. Without that experimental phase, the researchers can’t make a causative connection between eating fermented foods and reduced social anxiety.

“However, if we rely on the animal models that have come before us and the human experimental work that has come before us in other anxiety and depression studies, it does seem that there is a causative mechanism,” said Hilimire.

“Assuming similar findings in the experimental follow-up, what it would suggest is that you could augment more traditional therapies (like medications, psychotherapy or a combination of the two) with fermented foods — dietary changes — and exercise, as well.”

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Source: University of Maryland, Baltimore



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