



The Perfect BREAKFAST.

SO WHAT ARE GRANOLA AND KOMBUCHA AND WHY WOULD ONE ORDER THEM ON A MENU?

Anthony and Jody from Tonicka are a multi-skilled duo producing a range of healthy products including a raw granola and a fermented drink known as 'kombucha'. Sounds like the perfect breakfast to me!

As a health conscious consumer contributing to the current trend towards raw and organic whole foods, I'd just love it if I found these two together on a menu in one of my local cafés. I might even choose them for lunch!

So what are granola and kombucha and why would one order them on a menu?

Granola became famous in the 70's with that popular Hot August Night song, which is apparently about 'a man who found solace from his problems by eating granola'. According to one source it was written when

Neil Diamond was living in health conscious California where he wanted to contribute to changing people's eating habits.

Trivia aside, 'granola' is what we in Australia usually call 'muesli' which can be eaten raw or toasted. It's any combination of things like oats, honey, nuts, seeds and fruit – usually eaten with yoghurt. Yummy comfort food when you're out for breakfast!

Because the combinations are endless, this makes granola a great option for a café menu. Two are never the same. On the other hand, there's only so much you can do to make spinach and eggs different.

Café owners and health conscious consumers be warned however, some granolas are not healthy. They're full of sugar and

bad fats, especially if toasted. Jodie, who's the chef in the duo, has designed a vegan, gluten-free granola using only certified organic ingredients with added probiotics. She has three flavour combos: fig and pecan, chocolate and strawberry, mixed berry & chia. They recommend eating it raw with almond or cashew milk. Why raw? In Anthony's words, 'living vibrant plant based foods are amazing for health and wellbeing. Even when we dehydrate we do so to 45 degrees maximum, ensuring the foods are kept in their truest form to maximise the health benefit.'

The other advantage for café owners is that granola is convenient. There's no cooking and no waste and you don't have to order it in fresh every day. You can prepare it ahead in serving



portions. I noticed it everywhere in the USA pre-prepared in parfait glasses (or convenient take-away containers) topped with yoghurt and fruit.

Kombucha is 'a living, prebiotic and probiotic fermented cold tea with a light, natural carbonation' according to Anthony. Let me translate ...

'Living' means that it contains live bacteria and yeasts of the good variety with immune boosting and health promoting properties. They do this by topping up the bacteria in your gut (often referred to as 'flora'), something which can improve both your physical wellbeing by increasing things like energy levels and your emotional wellbeing by elevating your mood, and that's according to my natural health care practitioners.

'Probiotic' refers to the live good bacteria (also known as flora) in your gut and 'prebiotic', plant fibers that nourish these good bacteria.

'Fermented' means it has a culture that grows good bacteria. In the case of Kombucha, the culture is a mushroom-like growth known as SCOBY, which stands for 'Symbiosis Culture of Bacteria and Yeast'. To ensure this culture (or 'mother' as it's sometimes called) thrives, small amounts of yeast and sugar are added. These are the foods the SCOBY likes and during the fermenting stage, the yeast consumes the sugar, which ferments to acetic acid. This gives what would otherwise be a simple tea beverage it's distinctive taste and apple cider undertone, the sign of a good brew.

'Light, natural carbonation' means that you experience a slight 'fizz' on drinking. This comes from the fact that the SCOBY covers the top of the brew, trapping tiny CO bubbles released during the fermentation process.

Kombucha can be made from any kind of tea, including black and green tea, so consumers have a variety to choose from. It's a new taste sensation for some people. Anthony explained that when this is the case, the second sip is always more enjoyable than the first because your palate and brain have time to adjust and accept the new experience. So don't be in a hurry when getting used to kombucha; allow your brain time to make the shift. Anthony also explained that you might experience a few 'floaties' in your brew; bits broken off the 'mother' culture. He says to eat them; they're good for you!

Another word of warning for café owners and consumers, don't assume all kombuchas are good for you. Some have added flavours and sugar that may not be healthy. Jodie adds flavours such as berries and spice, lemon, lime and ginger as well as elderflower.

Also, if kombucha has been brewed or stored in containers other than glass, be aware that the fermentation process may leach out dangerous chemicals like lead found in ceramic glazes. Anthony packages his range in glass bottles that look like beer bottles, so Tonicka kombucha is the perfect option for the designated driver who wants something different on a night out on the town but won't choose sugar-laden soft drinks! Know, however, kombucha is not alcohol free, with most containing between 0.5% and 3% alcohol. So count your drinks! It's also good for the passenger who's had one drink too many, as it's believed to help cure a hangover! Tonicka also has Kombucha on tap, a bit like beer or nitro coffee.

Like granola, kombucha experienced a peak in popularity during the 1970s with the hippie movement. These were mainly home brews with some microbiological mistakes and the associated risks attracting bad press.

While kombucha may be new to some café and bar menus, it's been around for longer than history knows, possibly originating in China some 2000 years ago. Many traditional cultures around the world developed their own versions of fermented tea, which they drank for good health and longevity. It's been popular

in Russia for almost as long, where it's known as 'kvass'.

Legend has it that kombucha was named after a Korean physician 'Kombu' who healed a Japanese Emperor with fermented 'cha' (which means tea.) Subsequently the cure was named after the physician and the word for tea.

Kombucha has been linked to a myriad of health benefits – from its possible anti-inflammatory, anti-microbial, anti-oxidant and cancer fighting properties, to slowing the ageing process, fighting flu, lowering blood sugar, aiding digestion, cleansing the liver and kidneys to relieving symptoms of nausea, bloating, arthritis, eczema, irritable bowel, candida and Crohn's disease and many more.

These are significant claims for which I'm no expert to comment. There's scientific backing to some of them, however the research is scant and we have to rely on the enormous number of anecdotal claims you'll find out there.

What we can rely on with great confidence is that kombucha is related to a group of raw, fermented foods like Turkish kefir, Korean kimchi, German sauerkraut and plain old yoghurt, that are steeped in tradition and centuries of belief about their health promoting properties.

So can we expect kombucha to peak in popularity once again, but this time on café and bar menus in Australia? It certainly looks like it will, as more people get used to its distinctive taste and as more research is done to sort the myth from the magic.

If you'd like to be part of the trend towards healthy, whole foods, tuck into a bowl of raw granola and a bottle of Tonicka kombucha, do the research and decide for yourself if they're choices worth offering for breakfast at your place.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR:

Christine Cottrell is a widely travelled coffee enthusiast with a passion for writing, photography and healthy living. She's the author of the Barista Bible (now in its 2nd international edition) and the Perfect Espresso Training System – a series of coffee books and training materials that are now selling globally.
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