Understanding Kombucha

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What is kombucha and how is it made?

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What does probiotic mean?

Probiotic means that a living microorganism, such as yeast (shown on the left) or bacteria, can produce a health benefit to the host organism. Probiotics are found in fermented foods that contain live cultures of these microorganisms such as yogurt, sauerkraut, and pickles. Since kombucha is also a fermented product and frequently contains live cultures, it can be a probiotic food, too.

How does alcohol and the TTB play in?

If the finished kombucha contains any remaining sugar, the fermentation can start up again and more alcohol can be produced. A product that contains more than 0.5% alcohol by volume is considered an alcoholic product and is regulated by the Alcohol and Tobacco Tax and Trade Bureau (TTB). This pdf by the TTB answers some commonly asked questions about kombucha regulations. To be considered a non-alcoholic beverage, the alcohol may not reach above 0.5% at any point during production or after bottling.

How to keep the alcohol low?

Since alcohol is produced by yeast utilizing sugar, any sugar additions after fermentation should be avoided. Some flavoring products, such as juice, contain sugar or alcohol so their use should be monitored as an increase in alcohol could occur. Also, chilling kombucha will prevent the yeast from creating alcohol, but this method cannot be used to sell the kombucha on the market since refrigeration is not always reliable. To completely eliminate the risk of increased alcohol, pasteurization or filtration should be used. However, this will eliminate the probiotic nature of the kombucha and any possibly associated health effects. The FDA may regulate the production of Kombucha to include pasteurization due to suspicion that some kombucha products may be unsafe for human consumption.

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