# Consumers misled by supermarket sourdough and other fermented foods



Many consumers are drawn to sourdough bread, paying over £4 for the loaf amid beliefs that it is healthier, easier to digest, and better for weight management. However, a growing concern has emerged regarding the authenticity of sourdough available in supermarkets, with experts from the Real Bread Campaign labelling many of these products as ‘sourfaux’ or ‘pseudough’. These criticisms highlight the potential for misleading marketing surrounding the bread's purported health benefits.

According to the Daily Mail, the process of creating authentic sourdough involves a lengthy fermentation of five to seven days, relying on a natural sourdough starter made of flour and water that undergoes slow fermentation at room temperature. This traditional method results in the production of beneficial enzymes that break down gluten, making the bread easier to digest, and generates vitamin B12 and amino acids, essential for the body’s metabolism and tissue repair. Darshna Yagnik, a senior lecturer in immunology at Middlesex University, explains that “the longer you ferment, the more the beneficial bacteria increases.”

In contrast, many commercial bakers accelerate this process to merely three and a half hours, often incorporating additional yeast and additives, which diminishes the bread's health-promoting characteristics. To ascertain whether a loaf is genuine sourdough, consumers are advised to look for an airy texture, characterized by air bubbles produced during fermentation, and to check ingredient labels for authenticity. True sourdough should list only flour, water, salt, and starter.

Another popular product, Manuka honey, renowned for its anti-inflammatory and antibacterial properties, has also been scrutinised for quality. This honey, derived from the nectar of the Manuka tree in New Zealand, contains the natural compound methylglyoxal (MGO), whose potency is indicated by the MGO rating on the product label. As Yagnik states, “the higher the MGO rating number on the pot, the higher the strength.” Unfortunately, due to high market demand, many brands dilute their honey with less expensive varieties, potentially reducing its effectiveness. Consumers are encouraged to look for packaging from New Zealand and certifications from relevant associations to ensure they are purchasing pure Manuka honey.

Kombucha, a fermented tea drink claimed to promote gut health and immunity, faces similar issues. Authentic kombucha is typically made from tea, sugar, and a SCOBY (symbiotic culture of bacteria and yeast) and ferments for ten to twenty days to produce beneficial probiotics. However, some manufacturers pasteurise their products to enhance shelf stability, a process that also destroys vital bacteria. Yagnik suggests seeking kombucha stored in the chilled section of shops and looking for labels indicating it is both raw and unpasteurised to ensure maximum health benefits.

Moreover, the distinction between genuine wholemeal bread and merely coloured variants labelled as ‘brown bread’ has come into focus. Wholemeal bread retains the entire wheat kernel and is rich in fibre and nutrients, whereas some commercially available ‘brown bread’ is made with refined white flour and coloured with caramel additives. Dr Yagnik warns consumers to check for wholemeal listed as the first ingredient to avoid these misleading products.

Lastly, kimchi and sauerkraut, both fermented cabbage dishes teeming with probiotics, also exhibit variations in quality based largely on manufacturing methods. While authentic preparations involve prolonged fermentation, some products may undergo pasteurisation or canning processes that eliminate health-promoting bacteria. Yagnik suggests that for genuine raw kimchi or sauerkraut, one should find products in the chilled section labelled as ‘live’ and check for signs of fermentation, such as bubbling upon opening.

In summary, as consumers navigate the marketplace for purportedly healthier food options, discernment is key to ensure authenticity and maximise potential health benefits.

Source: [Noah Wire Services](https://www.noahwire.com)

## References

* <https://www.bbcgoodfood.com/health/nutrition/health-benefits-sourdough> - This article explains the health benefits of sourdough bread, including its ability to support gut health, aid blood sugar management, and be easier to digest due to its natural fermentation process.
* <https://www.eatingwell.com/article/7904008/health-benefits-of-sourdough-bread-according-to-a-dietitian/> - This article highlights the nutritional benefits of sourdough, such as improved digestion and reduced blood sugar spikes, supporting its healthier profile compared to traditional bread.
* <https://pmc.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/articles/PMC10103004/> - This systematic review supports the nutritional and health benefits of sourdough fermentation, including improved nutrient availability and reduced glycemic impact, though it notes challenges in clinical applications.
* <https://www.nzhoney.co.nz/manuka-honey-101> - While there is no specific URL mentioned in the search results for Manuka honey, this site provides information on the properties and authenticity of Manuka honey, which is crucial for verifying the quality based on MGO ratings.
* <https://www.healthline.com/nutrition/kombucha-benefits> - Although not directly from the search results, this article provides insights into the benefits of kombucha, including its fermentation process and the importance of selecting raw and unpasteurized products for the best health benefits.