

WORD OF MOUTH: The answer to better health is in your guts

By ROSEMARIE MILSOM July 18, 2014, 10 p.m.



A COUPLE of years ago, Felicity Evans had two children under two and was struggling with a range of health issues. "I'd stay in bed for days at a time," she remembers. "My husband had to take time off work to help me. I saw every naturopath in town and I learnt that a large part of your immunity lies in your gut. The best way to get yourself healthy is to fix your gut."

Evans had previously had a long-term illness while travelling in Central and South America on her honeymoon six years earlier. She spent time in hospital and recuperated in a Guatemalan village with a local family. It was there she was introduced to water kefir, a naturally fizzy fermented drink that is full of probiotics and enzymes. She felt better in days.

Fast forward to two years ago, and Evans decided to try her hand at making kefir. She bought a standard brewing kit from a local department store and sourced the starter culture. It worked. "Within about two days, I could feel something had shifted," she says. "I made more and gave it to friends who ended up knocking on my door asking for more."

The Imbibe label was born last year and Evans now produces 100 litres a week for local health food and organic stores. At one of her regular tastings at Hunter Organics at The Junction, curious customers stop to sample the four variations, which are infused with a range of natural, organic ingredients including turmeric, honey, blackcurrant, green tea, mint and ginger.

The flavour is subtle and the fermentation process means the kefir is fizzy like a soft drink, but without the artificial ingredients and high sugar content.

Water kefir is ideal for people who can't tolerate the dairy-based version.

"You are what you absorb, not what you eat," says Evans, who is passionate about the health benefits of kefir and other fermented food such as sauerkraut and beetroot, which she also makes.

"There are billions of CFUs [colony forming units] in each bottle, which reflects the activity of the probiotics. It's a living food and your body absorbs it very easily."

I'll drink to that.