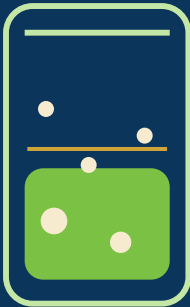


Begin with Bread: The GoHealthy Sourdough Starter Guide

A practical five-day path from flour and water to a lively starter - with simple feedings, safety notes, troubleshooting and a printable log.

START SMALL	WATCH THE RHYTHM	KEEP IT LIVING
A scale, a clean jar, flour and water are enough.	Feed on schedule and mark the level after every feeding.	Choose a daily counter routine or an easy refrigerator routine.

SMALL-BATCH METHOD	50 g starter 50 g water 50 g flour
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READ THIS FIRST

A starter is alive - and raw flour is still raw.

A sourdough starter is a culture of wild yeast and lactic acid bacteria living in flour and water. The yeast produces carbon dioxide that helps bread rise; the bacteria produce acids that shape flavor and help the culture resist unwanted microbes.

**DO NOT
TASTE IT
RAW**

Flour is a raw agricultural food and may contain harmful bacteria. Do not taste raw starter, dough or batter. Use sight, smell, timing and rise to judge the culture, then bake it thoroughly before eating.

Five habits for a safer starter

- Wash hands and begin with clean equipment, a clean work surface and fresh ingredients.
- Use a food-safe nonreactive jar with room for the starter to expand. A one-quart jar is a comfortable size for this method.
- Cover loosely while the starter ferments so gas can escape while dust and insects stay out.
- Keep the sides of the jar clean, mark the starter level after feeding and record what you observe.
- Discard the entire starter if you see colored or fuzzy mold, pink or orange streaks, or another clear sign of contamination.

NORMAL SIGNS	STOP AND DISCARD
Bubbles, expansion, a batter-like texture and a pleasantly tangy or fruity smell	Colored or fuzzy mold, pink or orange discoloration, rotten odor or obvious contamination
A grayish liquid layer with an alcohol-like smell can mean the starter is hungry	When you are not sure whether a surface growth is mold, choose safety and start again

SET UP

Measure by weight for a steadier routine.

DIGITAL SCALE Grams keep the flour and water ratio consistent and make small feedings easy.	CLEAN JAR Use a clear, food-safe container that holds at least one quart, plus a loose lid.
FLOUR Begin with whole wheat or rye flour. Feed with unbleached all-purpose flour after day one.	WATER Use cool or room-temperature water. If your tap water smells strongly of treatment chemicals, use filtered water.
MARKER A rubber band or washable marker shows the level immediately after feeding.	SPATULA A clean spoon or small silicone spatula makes mixing and jar cleanup easier.

The small-batch feeding formula

KEEP	ADD WATER	ADD FLOUR	TOTAL
50 g starter	50 g water	50 g flour	150 g freshly fed starter

WHY DISCARD?

Removing starter before feeding keeps the culture small and gives the remaining microorganisms enough fresh food. Once the culture is healthy, removed starter can be shared or used in fully cooked discard recipes.

Room-temperature target

Aim for a comfortable room near 70 F. Cooler rooms slow fermentation; very warm rooms can make the starter race through its food. Watch the starter, not only the clock.

BUILD YOUR STARTER

Days 1 and 2: wake the culture gently.

DAY 1 - MIX

INGREDIENT	AMOUNT
Whole wheat or rye flour	50 g
Cool or room-temperature water	50 g

Stir the flour and water together in the jar until no dry pockets remain. Scrape down the sides, cover loosely and mark the level. Leave at about 70 F for 24 hours.

DAY 2 - FIRST FEED

ACTION	AMOUNT
Keep starter	50 g
Add water	50 g
Add unbleached all-purpose flour	50 g

Remove all but 50 g of starter. Add the water and flour, mix well, cover loosely, mark the new level and rest for another 24 hours.

DO NOT PANIC

You may see no activity, or you may see a dramatic early burst of bubbles that later quiets down. Neither result tells the whole story. Keep feeding on schedule and let the culture develop.

Record three things

- The time you fed it.
- How high it rose compared with the marked starting level.
- Its aroma and appearance - without tasting it.

BUILD YOUR STARTER

Days 3 to 5+: build strength with rhythm.

Beginning on day 3, feed about every 12 hours. At each feeding, keep 50 g starter, then add 50 g water and 50 g unbleached all-purpose flour. Mix, cover loosely and mark the level.

DAY	MORNING	EVENING	WHAT TO WATCH
3	Feed 1:1:1	Feed 1:1:1	Small bubbles, fresh or fruity aroma, some expansion
4	Feed 1:1:1	Feed 1:1:1	More bubbles through the jar; rise may become easier to see
5	Feed 1:1:1	Feed 1:1:1	Look for reliable doubling within about 6 to 8 hours
6-7+	Continue if needed	Continue if needed	Keep going until the starter is vigorous and predictable

Ready to bake means repeatable activity

- The starter at least doubles after feeding, typically within about 6 to 8 hours near 70 F.
- Bubbles appear throughout the mixture, not only on the surface.
- The aroma is pleasantly tangy or fruity rather than rotten.
- The pattern repeats over more than one feeding.

THE CALENDAR IS A GUIDE

Some starters need longer than five days. Flour, water, temperature and feeding consistency all matter. Continue the same feedings if the culture looks clean but has not become reliably active.

Before your first bake

Feed the starter and use it when it is active and near its peak rise, following the sourdough recipe you selected. A starter that is still weak will usually give slower, less predictable dough fermentation.

Choose the routine that matches how often you bake.

ROUTINE	BEST FOR	WHAT TO DO
Counter	Frequent baking	Keep at room temperature and feed on a dependable schedule, generally every 12 to 24 hours depending on warmth and activity.
Refrigerator	Weekly or occasional baking	Once established, cover and refrigerate. Feed and use ideally about weekly. Bring it out before baking and feed until vigorous again.

Simple weekly refrigerator care

- Remove the starter from the refrigerator and loosen the lid. Let it warm for 1 to 2 hours.
- Keep 50 g starter. Feed it with 50 g water and 50 g flour.
- Cover loosely and let it ferment until clearly active and expanded.
- For baking, continue feeding as needed until it reliably doubles. For storage, refrigerate after it has risen and begun to settle, then cover securely.

GOING AWAY?

A healthy starter can be dried for longer storage. Spread a thin layer on parchment, let it dry completely, break into flakes and store airtight. Rehydration takes several days and regular feeding.

Use discard with care

Once your starter is established and clean, use discard in recipes that will be fully cooked, such as crackers, pancakes, waffles, flatbreads or muffins. Do not eat discard raw. Discard from a moldy or contaminated starter should never be used.

TROUBLESHOOT

Read the clues before changing everything.

WHAT YOU SEE	WHAT IT MAY MEAN	NEXT MOVE
Few bubbles or little rise	The room is cool, the culture is young or feedings are inconsistent	Keep the schedule steady; move to a gently warmer location near 70 F
Starter rises and falls quickly	The room is warm or the starter is using its food quickly	Feed sooner, use cooler water or choose a slightly cooler location
Gray liquid with alcohol-like smell	A fermentation by-product often called hooch; the starter is hungry	Pour it off or stir it in, then feed the starter
Sharp acetone-like smell	The starter likely needs fresh food	Feed consistently and watch whether the aroma returns to pleasantly tangy
Overflow	The jar is too small or the culture is rising faster than expected	Move to a clean larger jar and place a dish underneath
Colored or fuzzy growth	Mold or clear contamination	Discard everything; clean the container thoroughly and start over

WHEN IN DOUBT

Do not scrape mold off and keep the starter. If you cannot confidently distinguish an unusual surface growth from a harmless fermentation by-product, discard the culture and begin again.

Keep one variable steady

When activity slows, avoid changing the flour, water, temperature and feeding ratio all at once. Keep a short log, change one factor at a time and give the culture a few feedings to respond.

This guide covers a traditional flour-and-water starter. Starters made with milk, sugar, fruit or other additions behave differently and may need different food-safety controls.

Your seven-day starter log.

DAY	FEED TIME	ROOM TEMP	RISE / PEAK TIME	AROMA + NOTES
1				
2				
3				
4				
5				
6				
7				

Trusted sources

[Colorado State University Extension - Sourdough Starter Best Practices](#)

[Colorado State University Extension - Sourdough Basics: Caring for Your Starter and Making Bread](#)

[U.S. Food and Drug Administration - Flour Is a Raw Food and Other Safety Facts](#)

[King Arthur Baking Test Kitchen - Sourdough Starter Recipe](#)

Method note

The five-day small-batch schedule in this guide follows the King Arthur Test Kitchen's February 2026 method and is paired with current food-safety guidance from Colorado State University Extension and the FDA. Fermentation speed varies, so activity and repeatability matter more than a fixed date.

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NOTE**

This guide is for general food education. It does not replace a tested bread recipe, local cottage-food requirements or individualized medical or nutrition advice.