

Dairy Foods & Fitness

What counts as part of the Dairy Food Group?

All liquid products derived from milk and foods made from milk comprise the dairy group. Foods that are made from milk and retain or keep their calcium content are also a part of this group. Calcium fortified soy beverages or soy milk are also part of the dairy group. Food products that are made from milk, but have little to no calcium content, such as butter, cream and cream cheese, are not part of the dairy group.

Some items in the dairy food group include:

- All liquid milk: fat-free (skim), low fat (1%), reduced fat (2%), whole milk.
- Lactose-reduced milks, lactose-free milks.
- Flavored milks: chocolate, strawberry.
- Milk-based desserts: ice cream, frozen yogurt, ice milk, puddings made with milk.
- Hard natural cheeses: cheddar, mozzarella, Swiss, Parmesan.
- Soft cheeses: ricotta, cottage cheese.
- Processed cheeses: American.
- All Yogurt: fat-free, low fat, reduced fat, whole milk yogurt.

How much is needed from the Dairy Food Group?

When making a choice from the calcium-rich dairy group, select items that are non-fat or low fat. If you usually drink whole milk, switch gradually towards fat-free milk (skim). If you don't or can't consume milk products, choose lactose-free products or other calcium sources.

The amount of intake from the dairy group is determined by a person's age, gender and level of physical activity. Typically for children, girls and boys, under the age of 8, the recommended daily amount is 2-2 1/2 cups. For girls and boys over the age of 9, and men and women, 3 cups is the recommended daily amount.

What counts as a cup?

Generally, one cup of milk, soy milk, or yogurt, 1 1/2 ounces of natural cheese, or 2 ounces of cheese that has been processed can be considered 1 cup from the group of dairy. In other words:

- 1 cup from the milk group = 1 cup of milk, soy milk, or yogurt or
- 1 cup from the milk group = 1 1/2 ounces of natural cheese or
- 1 cup from the milk group = 2 ounces of processed cheese

5 tips for Making Wise Choices

MyPlate offers several tips to help you make wise choices when it comes to dairy, for example:

- Include calcium fortified soy milk or soy beverages or milk as a beverage with your meals, particularly if the milk is low-fat or fat-free.
- Add low fat or fat-free milk instead of water to hot cereals and oatmeal.
- Have fat-free or low-fat yogurt as a snack. It is already pre-packaged in most instances and can be quick and convenient.
- Make a dip for vegetables and fruit from yogurt.
- Put low fat or reduced fat cheese on top of casseroles, soups, vegetables, and eggs.



Health Benefits and Nutrients

Foods from the dairy group offer nutrients that are essential to health and maintenance of the body, especially calcium, potassium, vitamin D and protein. Dairy products are the preeminent source of calcium in most Americans' diets. Calcium is helpful for building teeth and bones and in maintaining bone mass. Potassium helps to sustain a healthy blood pressure. Vitamin D plays an important role in maintaining the right levels of phosphorus and calcium, to build better bone mass and density.

There is a number of health benefits associated with the consumption of milk, particularly when it comes to a person's bone health. A diet rich in milk products can reduce the risk of low bone mass throughout the life cycle. You can improve your bone mass if your diet provides you with the recommended 3 cups or the equivalent of milk products per day.

Health benefits from dairy include the possible reduction of bone issues such as osteoporosis as well as the risk of reducing health conditions such as type 2 diabetes, cardiovascular disease, and lowering blood pressures in adults.

Truths About Dairy Foods

- Is it true that people who exercise should not drink milk because it causes weight gain?
- Will fruit help you lose weight? In fact, a lack of calcium may actually contribute to muscle-wasting since calcium is required for normal muscle contraction. Those who are truly lactose intolerant may experience stomach cramps, but there are many lactose-reduced milk products available on the market.

- Is it true that dairy should avoid dairy foods because they are fattening?
- Are most "low-fat" foods really low in fat? Low-fat foods, even those that are not low in fat and calories, can be part of your diet when eaten in moderation and balanced with less-saturated, less-fatty foods. It is the total amount of fat and calories you eat in a day that counts.

- Is it true that milk digests slowly and can slow you down or upset your stomach?
- Not to get in last, many athletes prefer a liquid, milk-based meal several hours before competition because it digests so quickly.

- Is it true that 3 glasses of milk is not recommended as a fluid requirement after a workout?

- Not true! Milk contains as much water as juice or soda. It also contains some carbohydrates from the lactose sugar and loads of potassium. A glass of low-fat milk has the same calorie content as a glass of juice or soda.

