

## A Dab Of Dairy Will Do You Good

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June – a month to celebrate graduations, weddings, Father’s Day, and the great benefits of the Blue group on MyPyramid – the Milk Group. An ice-cold glass of milk on a warm summer day not only refreshes but offers a powerhouse of nutrition. Milk Group foods include milk, cheese, and yogurt and are rich in calcium, potassium, phosphorus, protein, Vitamin D, Vitamin A, and several B vitamins.

Calcium is key to building strong bones and teeth as well as nerve functioning, muscle contraction, and blood clotting. Potassium regulates the body’s fluid balance and helps maintain normal blood pressure. It also is used for muscle contraction and activity. Phosphorus, like calcium, strengthens bones and produces energy in cells. Protein builds and repairs muscle tissue and provides energy during high-powered, enduring exercise.

Vitamin D is essential for helping the body to absorb and use calcium and phosphorus. Vitamin A helps maintain healthy skin and vision, especially night vision, and plays a role in keeping the immune system healthy and regulating cell growth. The B vitamins are useful in maintaining the nervous system and converting food into energy.

How much is needed? Children ages 2-8 should consume two cups per day. Ages nine through adulthood should consume three cups per day. An eight-ounce glass of milk or cup of yogurt equals one cup. A six-ounce cup of yogurt equals 3/4 cup; a four-ounce snack size container equals 1/2 cup. One 1-1/2-ounce slice of hard cheese (cheddar, mozzarella, Swiss, parmesan) is equivalent to 1/2 cup milk. One slice of processed cheese is equivalent to 1/3 cup milk while 1/2 cup cottage cheese is equivalent to 1/4 cup milk.

Choose low-fat or fat-free varieties of Milk Group foods to reduce dietary saturated fat and cholesterol. Many cheeses, whole milk, and products made from them are high in saturated fat. Diets high in saturated fat raise LDL (low-density lipoprotein), or “bad,” cholesterol levels, which increases the risk for coronary heart disease. But are low-fat and fat-free varieties less nutritious? No. In fact, low-fat and fat-free milk, yogurt, and cheeses have the same levels of calcium and other nutrients as whole milk products but without the saturated fat and cholesterol so you are getting a better nutritional value for your dollar.

Not sure how to make the switch? An easy way is to blend higher- and lower-fat milk products. If you are drinking whole or two-percent milk, mix half with low-fat or fat-free milk. Gradually, add more low-fat or fat-free until you have replaced the whole or two-percent milk completely. This step down method allows your tastebuds to adjust to the lower fat content. *A special note:* Children under age two need whole milk for energy and cell development. After their second birthday, transition the child to low-fat or fat-free milk products.

A variety of low-fat or fat-free cheeses are available in block, cubed, and shredded forms for your favorite recipes, sandwiches, and snacking. The sharper or stronger the flavor, the less cheese is

needed in a dish. Plain yogurt with fresh fruit makes a healthy snack or dessert. If you prefer flavored yogurt, mix half with fat-free plain to reduce the sugar content per serving; add fruit, if desired.

Milk, cheese, and yogurt are essential foods in a healthy, balanced diet. Aim for three cups per day to keep your bones and teeth strong and to reduce the risk of osteoporosis.

Sources: [www.mypyramid.gov](http://www.mypyramid.gov)  
[www.3aday.org](http://www.3aday.org)