

# Udderly Nutritious

by Kirsten Weir, Tracey Middlekauff

## Milk It for Life!

"Milk is the best. It has so many vitamins and nutrients, and it comes in all shapes, flavors, and varieties," says Josie D., seventeen. She ought to know a thing or two about it. She lives on a dairy farm where ice cream and other products are made and sold. She also holds a Dairy Princess title in Maryland, which she won in part because of her knowledge of dairy products. Her duties include visiting schools and talking to kids about one of her favorite topics: milk.

"Everybody needs it," she says. "The calcium in milk is essential for proper bone development."

Josie is right. Milk is a nutritional powerhouse. It has a whopping nine essential vitamins, minerals, and nutrients. Some of the most important ones include calcium and vitamin D for strong bones, potassium and vitamin B12 for a healthy nervous system, and protein for building muscles.

"Plus," she adds, "it's absolutely delicious!"

Not all milk (and products that come from milk), however, is created equal. Read on to learn some of the best ways to enjoy this healthy beverage.

**Does whole milk have more nutrients than skim milk?** Not necessarily. What whole milk *does* have is more fat—about ten grams of fat per cup. Most teens need only around fifty grams of fat each day (it depends on your weight, your age, and how active you are). Skim milk has had most of the fat removed, or skimmed off, but it has the same nutritional benefits as whole milk. Most kids can switch to skim milk once they reach age two.

Registered dietitian Bonnie Taub-Dix, author of *Read It Before You Eat It*, recommends drinking skim milk that has had extra calcium added.

The key thing to remember is that you should get about 1,200 milligrams of calcium a day. That amounts to roughly four eight-ounce glasses of milk. Remember to read the label on the carton so that you know exactly how much calcium you're getting.

**Is chocolate milk bad for me?** Because of the extra sugar and calories in chocolate milk, most dietitians will tell you that it's better to drink plain milk. But as registered dietitian Marilyn K. Tanner-Blasiar, an American Dietetic Association spokesperson, points out, "If that's all you'll drink, I would rather you get

the many bountiful nutrients from milk than not drink it at all. But low-fat is definitely the way to go. And if you're craving a chocolate bar, definitely go for the milk instead."

Instead of drinking chocolate milk straight from the carton, Taub-Dix suggests mixing some chocolate milk with plain milk to cut down on sugar while keeping the chocolaty flavor. Or make your own chocolate shake by combining white skim milk, a small amount of chocolate syrup, and ice in a blender. "It's a great snack," she says.

**My friend is lactose intolerant. What does that mean?** People who are lactose intolerant lack the ability to digest lactose, a type of sugar that is a key component of milk. For those people, eating dairy can lead to upset stomachs, gas, and diarrhea. (Lactose intolerance is different from a milk protein allergy.) But being lactose intolerant doesn't mean you have to give up milk completely. According to Taub-Dix, supplements such as Lactaid, taken before consuming milk, can help ease the symptoms.

Tanner-Blasiar, who is lactose intolerant, says that when she runs out of Lactaid, she reaches for a milk substitute such as soy, rice, or almond milk. Those "milks," from plants rather than animals, are also a good choice for vegans, who don't eat animal products. If you choose nondairy milks, make sure they are fortified with calcium and vitamin D so that you are getting those nutrients.

Taub-Dix points out that contrary to what you might think, most lactose intolerant people can actually enjoy cheese. That's because even though cheese is made from milk, it's low in lactose. One slice has only half a gram of it, while a cup of milk has eleven grams.

**I don't like milk. Are there other healthy dairy products out there?** Yes! Cheese, which is made from milk, is a fun and easy way to get calcium. But because cheese is so tasty, it's easy to forget about fat and calories and get too much of a good thing. "Don't go crazy and eat half a block of cheese," Tanner-Blasiar cautions. One and a half slices of cheese have about the same amount of calcium as a cup of milk.

Ice cream is another tasty milk product that just about everybody loves, but because it's high in sugar, calories, and fat, you shouldn't look to it for your daily calcium requirements. "Ice cream should be for a treat, not for every day," says Tanner-Blasiar.

Yogurt is made from milk that contains certain healthy bacteria, and it's a great substitute for plain milk. Just 6 ounces of yogurt has a healthy 350 milligrams of calcium, and it's generally low in fat. Even if you think you don't have time for breakfast, Taub-Dix says, "yogurt is so easy to have on the way to

school."

Because yogurt comes in many varieties, styles, and flavors, it's hard to get bored with it. Take your pick from skyr, a yogurt from Iceland; labneh, a thick Middle Eastern type of yogurt; or Swiss-style yogurt, which is generally thinner and contains some type of fruit. Greek yogurt, which is available in most supermarkets, is higher in protein than most other yogurts. "It really keeps you going," Taub-Dix says.

If you don't feel like eating yogurt, why not drink it? Kefir (ke-FIR), which you can find in the yogurt section of the grocery store, is similar to a liquid yogurt. It comes in many flavors, such as blueberry, strawberry, and vanilla. It has all the flavor of a smoothie and comes in a low-fat version.

However you decide to enjoy milk or dairy products, the most important thing is to make sure that you're getting enough calcium and nutrients in your diet, without adding too much fat. By keeping that in mind, you can enjoy the health benefits of milk for years to come. Take it from Josie's sister Emmy, fifteen, who, like Josie, spreads the word about dairy through her volunteer work as a Dairy Maid. "I drank milk when I was little," she says. "And you know what? I still do!"