

MyPlate—The Dairy Group: Get Your Calcium-rich Foods

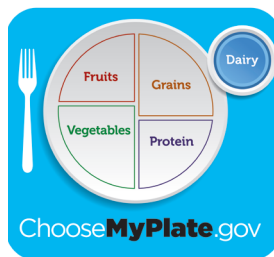
Revised by Raquel Garzon¹

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INTRODUCTION

The dairy group includes all liquid milk and products made with milk that retain their calcium after processing, including yogurt and cheese. Calcium-fortified soy milk is also part of the dairy group. Cream cheese, cream, and butter are not included because processing reduces or causes them to lose their calcium content.

Consuming dairy products can contribute to improved bone health. Other nutrients present in dairy products can contribute to maintaining healthy blood pressure.

NUTRIENTS IN THE DAIRY GROUP

The following nutrients are found in most dairy products. A typical American diet may be at risk for being low in nutrients marked with an asterisk (*).

***Calcium** is the most important nutrient provided by dairy products—it helps to grow healthy bones and teeth. Getting enough calcium in your diet helps avoid osteoporosis, a disease where bones develop many holes and can



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***Vitamin D** helps regulate levels of calcium and phosphorus in the blood. Vitamin D is not a naturally occurring substance in dairy products and is only found in products that have been fortified with vitamin D.

HOW MUCH DAIRY IS NEEDED?

MyPlate recommends eating between 2 and 3 cups of milk or milk products every day, depending on your age, gender, and level of physical activity (Table 1). For more information, visit www.choosemyplate.gov.

Table 1. Daily Recommendations for the Dairy Group

	Age	Cup(s)
Children	2–3 years	2
	4–8 years	2 1/2
Girls	9–13 years	3
	14–18 years	3
Boys	9–13 years	3
	14–18 years	3
Women	19–30 years	3
	31–50 years	3
	51+ years	3
Men	19–30 years	3
	31–50 years	3
	51+ years	3

be easily crushed or fractured. Calcium is also needed for muscle and nerve function and blood clotting.

***Potassium** helps maintain a healthy blood pressure and is needed for muscle and nerve function.

Protein builds, repairs, and maintains all body tissues, including bones, muscles, cartilage, skin, and blood. It also helps to fight infections, is a good source of energy, and serves as building blocks for enzymes, hormones, and vitamins.

Vitamin A aids in normal vision, keeps skin healthy, and helps protect against infections.

***Vitamin B12** helps keep nerve cells and red blood cells healthy and assists in making DNA.

WHAT DOES ONE CUP FROM THE DAIRY GROUP MEAN?

- 1 cup of milk
- 1 cup of calcium-fortified soy milk
- 1 cup of yogurt
- 1 1/2 ounces (2 slices) of hard cheese (cheddar, mozzarella, Swiss, Parmesan)
- 1/3 cup of shredded hard cheese (cheddar, mozzarella, Swiss, Parmesan; equivalent to 1 1/2 ounces)
- 2 ounces (3 slices) of processed cheese (American)
- 1 1/2 cups of ice cream
- 1 cup of pudding made with milk
- 2 cups of cottage cheese

CALCIUM AND LACTOSE INTOLERANCE

There are some people who cannot tolerate lactose, the sugar in milk, but they still need a source of calcium in their diets. As an alternative to milk, people with lactose intolerance can choose cheese and yogurt or lactose-free alternatives.

Here are some examples of foods that contain calcium that you can eat in place of milk or dairy products:

- Calcium-fortified juices
- Canned fish with bones (sardines and salmon)
- Soybeans and soy products (tofu)
- Leafy greens, such as collard and turnip greens, kale, and bok choy
- Calcium-fortified cereals and breads
- Calcium-fortified milk substitutes (soy milk, almond milk, rice milk, and others)

TIPS FOR CONSUMING MORE DAIRY PRODUCTS

- Drink milk or calcium-fortified beverages with each meal.
- Use milk to prepare cream soups.
- Add cheese to salads, pizza, casseroles, soups, and stews.
- Use milk to prepare hot cereals.
- Use milk in your hot beverages, such as lattes, cappuccinos, and teas.
- Eat yogurt or cheese sticks for a calcium-rich snack.
- Use yogurt as a dressing for salads or a topping for a baked potato, or try it mixed with fruit.
- Try ice cream, frozen yogurt, or pudding made with milk for dessert.

KEEP IT SAFE

- Avoid raw (unpasteurized) milk or products made from raw milk.
- Refrigerate dairy products promptly. If dairy products have been left at temperatures between 40° and 140°F for more than two hours, discard them.

“GO, SLOW, WHOA” FOODS

An easy way to make smart and nutritious choices within the dairy group is to use the “Go, Slow, Whoa” concept.

- **“Go” foods** are the most nutrient-dense; they contain more of the nutrients you need with relatively fewer calories. Eat them almost any time, based on your calorie needs.
 - Examples: fat-free or 1% low-fat milk; fat-free or low-fat yogurt; part-skim, reduced-fat, or fat-free cheese; low-fat or fat-free cottage cheese.
- **“Slow” foods** are higher in calories, fat, and/or sugar than “Go” foods. Eat them sometimes, at most several times a week.
 - Examples: 2% low-fat milk, processed cheese spread.

- **“Whoa” foods** are high in calories, fat, and/or sugar and offer little nutritional value. Eat them only once in a while or on special occasions, and in small portions.
 - Examples: whole milk; full-fat American, cheddar, Colby, or Swiss cheese; whole-milk yogurt; ice cream; cream cheese.

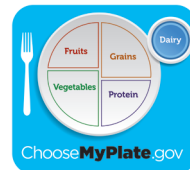
To learn more about “Go, Slow, and Whoa” foods, visit <http://www.nhlbi.nih.gov/health/public/heart/obesity/wecan/eat-right/choosing-foods.htm>.

REFERENCES

National Heart, Lung, and Blood Institute. 2012.

Choosing foods for your family: GO, SLOW, and WHOA foods [Online]. <https://www.nhlbi.nih.gov/health/educational/wecan/eat-right/choosing-foods.htm>

United States Department of Agriculture. 2018. ChooseMyPlate.gov: All about the dairy group [Online]. <https://www.choosemyplate.gov/dairy>



Visit **ChooseMyPlate.gov** for complete information on the MyPlate plan, including recipes, healthful eating tips, and tools to track your diet and exercise.

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