

FROM THE NUTRITIONIST

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Got Dairy?

Did you get your dairy today? Although many people think milk is only important for kids, the nutrients found in milk and other dairy foods, like yogurt and cheese, are important throughout the life cycle. Calcium, Vitamin D and phosphorus are all important for healthy bones throughout one's life. Other nutrients in dairy foods include protein, potassium and vitamins A, B2 and B12, which are needed for a host of other body functions. While you can obtain these nutrients from other foods, the convenience and taste of dairy foods make them great to include in a balanced eating plan.

Some people avoid dairy foods for a number of reasons, including lactose intolerance, milk protein allergy or a personal desire to avoid animal products. However, there are options available to meet everyone's needs. Lactose intolerance occurs when people don't have enough of the enzyme needed to break down lactose, the naturally occurring sugar in milk. Some people with lactose intolerance can consume regular dairy foods if they follow certain rules, like limiting portion sizes to small amounts at a time and consuming it with other foods. Dairy foods that are naturally lower in lactose, like yogurt and hard cheese, work well for many. Others may be better off with special lactose-reduced milk products such as Lactaid, which have added enzymes.

People who are allergic to milk protein or choose not to consume milk products for other reasons can get similar nutrients from fortified soy milk. Other milk alternatives, like almond milk and rice milk, are often low in protein or other nutrients found in dairy foods, so it's important to read labels and choose a product that contains the nutrients you need.

Check out these easy ways to include more dairy foods and alternatives in your diet:

- Try chocolate milk for a post-workout recovery drink
- Have a latte or cappuccino made with low-fat milk or soy milk instead of coffee with cream
- Top yogurt with fruit and granola for a tasty breakfast or dessert
- Make veggie dip with plain yogurt instead of sour cream
- Dip apple slices in a mixture of vanilla yogurt and cinnamon
- Add a slice of cheese to a sandwich or wrap
- Go old school with a glass of milk at each meal
- Snack on a bowl of whole grain cereal with milk

Andrea Hart, registered dietitian nutritionist and New York state-certified dietitian/nutritionist, is available for free, confidential, one-on-one counseling and as a speaker or facilitator for campus groups, panels or classes.