

Dairy foods: How much is enough?

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Key points:

- Consumption of milk, yogurt and cheese can protect us against heart disease and stroke, can reduce our risk of high blood pressure and some cancers and may reduce our risk of type 2 diabetes.
- The 2013 Australian Dietary Guidelines recommends higher intakes of the milk, yoghurt, cheese and/or alternatives food group for most age groups than previous dietary guidelines.
- Dairy foods are a natural source of 10 essential nutrients for human health.
- Milk, cheese and yogurt provide a convenient and readily absorbable source of calcium.
- Plant-based options with at least 100mg of added calcium per 100mL may be suitable alternatives.

Is dairy recommended under the Australian Dietary Guidelines?

Dairy foods including milk, cheese and yogurt are part of the five food groups the Australian Dietary Guidelines recommend we eat every day.

The five core food groups are:

- Vegetables and legumes/beans
- Fruit
- Milk, yoghurt, cheese and/or alternatives
- Grain (cereal) foods
- Lean meats and poultry, fish, eggs, tofu, nuts and seeds and legumes/beans.

Dairy foods have long been known for their role in bone health, but research over the last decade has demonstrated that consumption of milk, yogurt and cheese can protect us against heart disease and stroke, can reduce our risk of high blood pressure and some cancers and may reduce our risk of type 2 diabetes.

Current recommendations

As a result of the updated scientific evidence, the 2013 Australian Dietary Guidelines recommends higher intakes of the milk, yoghurt, cheese and/or alternatives food group for most age groups than previous dietary guidelines. Current recommendations for adults and children are shown below:

How much is a serve of milk*, yoghurt*, cheese* and/or alternatives?



A standard serve is (500–600kJ):

- 1 cup (250ml) fresh, UHT long life, reconstituted powdered milk or buttermilk
- ½ cup (120ml) evaporated milk
- 2 slices (40g) or 4 x 3 x 2cm cube (40g) of hard cheese, such as cheddar
- ½ cup (120g) ricotta cheese
- ¾ cup (200g) yoghurt
- 1 cup (250ml) soy, rice or other cereal drink with at least 100mg of added calcium per 100ml

*Choose mostly reduced fat

If you do not eat any foods from this group, try the following foods, which contain about the same amount of calcium as a serve of milk, yoghurt, cheese or alternatives (note: the kilojoule content of some of these serves (especially nuts) is higher so watch this if trying to lose weight).

- 100g almonds with skin
- 60g sardines, canned in water
- ½ cup (100g) canned pink salmon with bones
- 100g firm tofu (check the label as calcium levels vary)

Source: <https://www.eatforhealth.gov.au/food-essentials/five-food-groups/milk-yoghurt-cheese-andor-their-alternatives-mostly-reduced-fat> [accessed 15 July 2021].

Remember:

- Consumption of milk, yogurt and cheese can protect us against heart disease and stroke, can reduce our risk of high blood pressure and some cancers and may reduce our risk of type 2 diabetes.
- The 2013 Australian Dietary Guidelines recommends higher intakes of the milk, yoghurt, cheese and/or alternatives food group for most age groups than previous dietary guidelines.
- It is currently recommended that more than 50% of intake from dairy foods is reduced-fat varieties.

Other ways to include enough serves from the dairy food group include:

- 1 cup of fresh, flavoured, UHT long life or reconstituted powdered milk
- ½ cup (120 mL) evaporated unsweetened milk

It is currently recommended that more than 50% of intake from dairy foods is reduced-fat varieties.

Australians are not having enough!

Unfortunately, most Australians are missing out on the health benefits of consuming milk, yoghurt and cheese as they don't include enough in their diet. It is estimated that 8 out of 10 Australian adults need to increase their intake of dairy foods to achieve the levels recommended by the Australian Dietary Guidelines. Most Australian children also need to increase their intake to meet recommendations.

Contrary to popular belief, consumption of three to four daily serves of dairy foods, such as milk, yoghurt and cheese as part of a balanced diet is not linked to weight gain. Furthermore, including three to four daily serves of these dairy foods within a kilojoule-controlled diet can help accelerate loss of weight and body fat, improve muscle retention, and reduce waist circumference.

Instead, we need to cut down on foods that are not found within the five food groups. These foods are called discretionary choices. Examples of these foods include fried potatoes, cakes and muffins, soft drinks, alcoholic drinks, meat pies, biscuits, cakes, ice cream, high fat takeaway items and confectionary. Swapping these foods for milk, yogurt and cheese is one way to increase your intake.

Remember:

- Most Australians are missing out on the health benefits of consuming milk, yoghurt and cheese as they don't include enough in their diet.
- Consumption of three to four daily serves of dairy foods, such as milk, yoghurt and cheese as part of a balanced diet is not linked to weight gain.

Tips to increase your dairy intake

- Dairy foods are convenient and versatile, making them easy to include in a healthy, balanced diet. With a wide variety of dairy foods available, enjoying your recommended amount every day is easy. Try these ideas:
- Grab a caffè latte on the way to work.
- Have a bowl of fruit and yogurt for breakfast or after a workout.
- Include cheese in a salad or sandwich.
- Dollop natural yogurt on a jacket potato.

- For an energizing fruit smoothie, blend some fruit, yogurt and milk.
- Grate or shave parmesan or mozzarella cheese on pasta dishes.
- Have a warm glass of milk in the evening.

For recipes and ideas on how to include adequate serves of dairy foods in healthy meals, visit www.dairy.com.au/recipes.

Dairy foods – a power package of nutrients

Dairy foods are a natural source of 10 essential nutrients including calcium, potassium, phosphorous, magnesium, carbohydrate, protein, vitamin A, riboflavin, vitamin B12 and zinc.

These nutrients are important for healthy blood and immune systems, eyesight, muscle and nerve function, healthy skin, energy and growth and repair in all parts of your body.

Dairy foods – a good source of calcium

Milk, cheese and yogurt provide a convenient and readily absorbable source of calcium, contributing approximately 60% of the calcium we eat. Few foods provide as much absorbable calcium per serve as dairy foods.

Other foods like canned fish eaten with the bones, green leafy vegetables, nuts such as almonds, cereals and legumes also contribute calcium to the diet, but in much smaller amounts than dairy foods.

The following foods contain about the same amount of calcium as a serve of milk, yogurt or cheese:

- 100g almonds with skin
- 60g sardines, canned in water
- ½ cup canned pink salmon with bones
- 100g firm tofu (check the label as calcium levels vary)

For individuals who are unable to, or choose not to have dairy foods, plant-based alternatives such as soy drinks and foods with at least 100mg of added calcium per 100mL may be suitable.

Remember:

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Nutrition Australia acknowledges Dairy Australia as the original author of this fact sheet.