

What foods are in the milk, yogurt and cheese (milk) group?



All fluid milk products and many foods made from milk are considered part of this food group. Foods made from milk that retain their calcium content are part of the group, while foods made from milk that have little to no calcium, such as cream cheese, cream and butter, are not. Most milk group choices should be fat-free or low-fat. Some commonly eaten choices in the milk, yogurt and cheese group are:

Milk*

All fluid milk:
fat-free (skim)
low fat (1%)
reduced fat (2%)
whole milk

flavored milks:
chocolate
strawberry

lactose reduced milks
lactose free milks

Milk-based desserts*

Puddings made with milk
ice milk
frozen yogurt
ice cream

Cheese*

Hard natural cheeses:
cheddar
mozzarella
Swiss
parmesan

soft cheeses
ricotta
cottage cheese

processed cheeses
American

Yogurt*

All yogurt
Fat-free
low fat
reduced fat
whole milk yogurt

***Selection Tips**

Choose fat-free or low-fat milk, yogurt, and cheese. If you choose milk or yogurt that is not fat-free, or cheese that is not low-fat, the fat in the product counts as part of the discretionary calorie allowance.

If sweetened milk products are chosen (flavored milk, yogurt, drinkable yogurt, desserts), the added sugars also count as part of the discretionary calorie allowance.

For those who are lactose intolerant, lactose-free and lower-lactose products are available. These include hard cheeses and yogurt. Also, enzyme preparations can be added to milk to lower the lactose content. Calcium-fortified foods and beverages such as soy beverages or orange juice may provide calcium, but may not provide the other nutrients found in milk and milk products.

Health benefits and nutrients

Consuming milk and milk products provides health benefits—people who have a diet rich in milk and milk products can reduce the risk of low bone mass throughout the life cycle. Foods in the milk group provide nutrients that are vital for health and maintenance of your body. These nutrients include calcium, potassium, vitamin D and protein.

Health benefits

- Diets rich in milk and milk products help build and maintain bone mass throughout the lifecycle. This may reduce the risk of osteoporosis.
- The intake of milk products is especially important to bone health during childhood and adolescence, when bone mass is being built.
- Diets that include milk products tend to have a higher overall nutritional quality.

Nutrients

- Calcium is used for building bones and teeth and in maintaining bone mass. Milk products are the primary source of calcium in American diets. Diets that provide 3 cups or the equivalent of milk products per day can improve bone mass.

- Diets rich in potassium may help to maintain healthy blood pressure. Milk products, especially yogurt and fluid milk, provide potassium.
- Vitamin D functions in the body to maintain proper levels of calcium and phosphorous, thereby helping to build and maintain bones. Milk that is fortified with vitamin D is a good source of this nutrient. Other sources include vitamin D-fortified yogurt and vitamin D-fortified ready-to-eat breakfast cereals.
- Milk products that are consumed in their low-fat or fat-free forms provide little or no solid fat.



Why is it important to make fat-free or low-fat choices from the milk group? Choosing foods from the milk group that are high in saturated fats and cholesterol can have health implications. Diets high in saturated fats raise “bad” cholesterol levels in the blood. The “bad” cholesterol is called LDL (low-density lipoprotein) cholesterol. High LDL cholesterol, in turn, increases the risk for coronary heart disease. Many cheeses, whole milk, and products made from them are high in saturated fat. To help keep blood cholesterol levels healthy, limit the amount of these foods you eat. In addition, a high intake of fats makes it difficult to avoid consuming more calories than are needed.

How much food from the milk group is needed daily?

The amount of food from the Milk Group you need to eat depends on age. Recommended daily amounts are shown in the chart.

Children	2-3 years old	2 cups*
	4-8 years old	2 cups*
Girls	9-13 years old	3 cups*
	14-18 years old	3 cups*
Boys	9-13 years old	3 cups*
	14-18 years old	3 cups*
Women	19-30 years old	3 cups*
	31-50 years old	3 cups*
	51+ years old	3 cups*
Men	19-30 years old	3 cups*
	31-50 years old	3 cups*
	51+ years old	3 cups*

What counts as 1 cup in the milk group?

In general, 1 cup of milk or yogurt, 1½ ounces of natural cheese, or 2 ounces of processed cheese can be considered as 1 cup from the milk group. The chart lists specific amounts that count as 1 cup in the milk group towards your daily recommended intake:

	Amount that counts as 1 cup in the milk group	Common portions and cup
Milk [choose fat-free or low-fat milk most often]	1 cup 1 half-pint container ½ cup evaporated milk	
Yogurt [choose fat-free or low-fat yogurt most often]	1 regular container (8 fluid ounces) 1 cup	1 small container (6 ounces) = ¾ cup 1 snack size container (4 ounces) = ½ cup
Cheese [choose low-fat cheeses most often]	1½ ounces hard cheese (cheddar, mozzarella, Swiss, parmesan) ⅓ cup shredded cheese 2 ounces processed cheese (American) ½ cup ricotta cheese	1 slice of hard cheese is equivalent to ½ cup milk 1 slice of processed cheese is equivalent to ⅓ cup milk

	2 cups cottage cheese	½ cup cottage cheese is equivalent to ¼ cup milk
Milk-based desserts <i>[choose fat-free or low-fat types most often]</i>	1 cup pudding made with milk	
	1 cup frozen yogurt	
	1½ cups ice cream	1 scoop ice cream is equivalent to 1/3 cup milk

Tips for making wise choices

- Include milk as a beverage at meals. Choose fat-free or low-fat milk.
- If you usually drink whole milk, switch gradually to fat-free milk, to lower saturated fat and calories. Try reduced fat (2%), then low-fat (1%), and finally fat-free (skim).
- If you drink cappuccinos or lattes—ask for them with fat-free (skim) milk.
- Add fat-free or low-fat milk instead of water to oatmeal and hot cereals
- Use fat-free or low-fat milk when making condensed cream soups (such as cream of tomato).
- Have fat-free or low-fat yogurt as a snack.
- Make a dip for fruits or vegetables from yogurt.
- Make fruit-yogurt smoothies in the blender.
- For dessert, make chocolate or butterscotch pudding with fat-free or low-fat milk.
- Top cut-up fruit with flavored yogurt for a quick dessert.
- Top casseroles, soups, stews, or vegetables with shredded low-fat cheese.
- Top a baked potato with fat-free or low-fat yogurt.



Keep it safe to eat

- Avoid raw (unpasteurized) milk or any products made from unpasteurized milk.
- Chill (refrigerate) perishable food promptly and defrost foods properly. Refrigerate or freeze perishables, prepared food and leftovers as soon as possible. If food has been left at temperatures between 40° and 140° F for more than two hours, discard it, even though it may look and smell good.
- Separate raw, cooked and ready-to-eat foods.

For those who choose not to consume milk products

- If you avoid milk because of lactose intolerance, the most reliable way to get the health benefits of milk is to choose lactose-reduced or low-lactose alternatives within the milk group, such as cheese, yogurt, or lactase-treated milk, or to consume the enzyme lactase before consuming milk products.
- Calcium choices for those who do not consume milk products include
 - Calcium fortified juices, cereals, breads, soy beverages, or rice beverages
 - Canned fish (sardines, salmon with bones) soybeans and other soy products (soy-based beverages, soy yogurt, tempeh), some other dried beans, and some leafy greens (collard and turnip greens, kale, bok choy). The amount of calcium that can be absorbed from these foods varies. Click here for more information about non-dairy calcium sources.