

Dairy Foods Help People Thrive Across the Lifespan

The 2020-2025 Dietary Guidelines for Americans recognizes that dairy foods play an important role in healthy eating patterns from infancy through adulthood.¹



Grade Schoolers 6-12 Years:

Building healthy habits to last a lifetime.

Dairy's calcium, vitamin D, protein and phosphorus can help support bone mass, which may reduce risk for osteoporosis (or bone diseases) later in life.⁶ Dairy foods also provide sources of important nutrients that support the immune system, including high-quality protein, vitamins A and D, zinc and selenium.⁷



Infants 6-11 Months:

Building the foundation for healthy eating.

At about 6 months, infants should be introduced to nutrient-rich, developmentally appropriate foods to complement human milk or infant formula feedings to ensure adequate nutrition and encourage acceptance of a wide variety of nutritious foods.^{1,2} Cheese and yogurt offer a range of diverse tastes and textures, which can help support development of future healthy eating habits.³



Toddlers 12-23 Months:

Supporting growth and development.

After their first birthday, as babies transition from human milk or iron-fortified infant formula, whole milk and other dairy foods emerge as critically important sources of essential nutrients to support growth and development.⁴

Preschoolers 2-5 Years:

Delivering high-quality nutrition.

Leading health experts agree water and plain milk are the only recommended beverages for children 1 to 5 years of age.⁵ Plant-based alternatives are not recommended due to their wide variability in nutrient content, limited evidence of bioavailability and impact on diet quality and health outcomes.⁵



Teenagers 13-18 Years:

Supplying necessary nutrition for a crucial chapter.

Adolescence is a unique growth period, making nutritious food choices vitally important. However, the gap between the amount of dairy foods recommended and actually eaten widens as children age.¹ Teen girls are especially vulnerable to falling short of their vitamin B12 and bone-building nutrient needs.¹ Dairy foods provide more bone-beneficial nutrients per calorie than any other food group.⁸

Adults 19-59 Years:

Reducing risk of chronic diseases.

Healthy eating patterns that include low-fat or fat-free dairy foods are associated with reduced risk for several chronic diseases, including cardiovascular disease and type 2 diabetes.¹ In addition, dairy foods provide calcium and vitamin D, which are particularly important to accruing peak bone mass in early adulthood.¹



Older Adults 60+ Years:

Ageing vibrantly.

Older adults are at greater risk for health conditions related to changes in bone and loss of muscle mass, such as osteoporosis and sarcopenia.¹ Nutrient-rich dairy foods provide high-quality protein to help maintain muscle, as well as bone building nutrients important during bone remodeling that takes place post-menopause.¹



Pregnant and Breastfeeding Women:

Supporting baby's brain development.

Pregnant and breastfeeding women need higher amounts of some nutrients including vitamin B12, iodine and choline.^{1,2,9} As excellent sources of vitamin B12, dairy foods help support a healthy pregnancy and may help prevent vitamin B12 deficiency in infants which can lead to permanent neurological damage.¹⁰ As good sources of iodine, milk and yogurt may help protect against neurocognitive defects and lower childhood IQ linked to prenatal iodine deficiency.² Plus, the choline[†] found in dairy foods can help replenish maternal stores and support the growth and development of the baby's brain and spinal cord.^{1,2}

[†]One serving of milk provides 8% of the Daily Value for choline.



About 90%

of Americans could benefit from an extra serving of low-fat or fat-free dairy foods each day.¹

Dairy Foods are Flexible to Meet Personal Preferences

Low-fat and fat-free dairy foods contribute to health across the lifespan. Research shows there's also room to allow for fat flexibility. It is possible to stay within saturated fat recommendations while choosing whole milk dairy foods for one of the three servings of dairy foods recommended each day.¹¹

Daily Dairy Food Recommendations^{1,12}

Age Group	Age Range	Recommendation
Toddlers*	12-23 months	1 2/3 - 2 cups
	2-3 years	2 cups
Children	4-8 years	2 1/2 cups
	9-13 years	3 cups
Teenagers	14-18 years	3 cups
Adults	≥19 years	3 cups

*No longer receiving human milk or infant formula.



Dollar for dollar, dairy foods are one of the most economical sources of nutrition.^{13,14} In fact, three servings of milk can cost as little as \$0.60 per day.¹⁵ And there are a variety of options in the dairy case so people can customize their approach to building healthy habits.



*Fortified soy beverages and yogurt are classified within the dairy group because their nutrition content is similar to that of dairy foods. Other plant-based alternatives, such as almond or oat "milks," are not included within the group because their nutrient composition is not equivalent to dairy foods.



Lactose Intolerant?

While it is a serious condition, the good news is most people with lactose intolerance can tolerate varied amounts of lactose. There are many solutions to try so you can continue to enjoy the great taste and nutritional benefits of dairy foods. For example, try working small amounts into meals or choosing foods with minimal amounts or no lactose.

Did you know?

- ✓ Lactose-free milk is real milk, just without lactose.
- ✓ Natural cheeses such as Cheddar, Colby/Monterey Jack, Mozzarella and Swiss contain minimal amounts of lactose.
- ✓ Yogurt's live and active cultures help to digest lactose, plus Greek and Icelandic yogurts have even less lactose because of the straining process.

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