Elementary school years are filled with activity. To keep pace with packed schedules, fuel learning and play, build bone mass and support unique developmental needs at this life stage, high-quality nutrition – like the nutrients provided by dairy foods – is especially important. However, dairy consumption starts to slip below recommended levels before children start elementary school, with the gap widening as they enter school and become more independent. This means school-aged children are at risk of under consuming three key nutrients that dairy foods provide: potassium, calcium and vitamin D.

Dairy’s Unique Contributions

Dairy’s calcium, vitamin D, protein and phosphorus can help support bone mass, which may reduce risk for osteoporosis later in life. Osteoporosis may seem a long way off for kids, but building bone density early in life is vitally important.

Dairy foods like milk also provide essential nutrients that support the immune system, including high-quality protein, vitamins A and D, zinc and selenium.

Did You Know?

School meals are healthy and can go a long way in helping make every bite and sip count and ensuring well-rounded and nutrient-rich meals are within reach.

Special Considerations

Drinking low-fat or fat-free plain or flavored milk helps kids get their recommended servings of dairy. Whether plain or flavored, milk is a nutrient-rich and delicious option. Plus, flavored milk is low in added sugars compared to sugar-sweetened beverages and only contributes about 4% of added sugars in kids’ diets.

Recommended Daily Dairy Servings

6-8 years old
2½ cups

9-12 years old
3 cups

See backside for what counts as a serving of dairy. There are a variety of ways to enjoy milk, cheese and yogurt to meet the recommended daily servings.
It’s ok to have fun with food. Decorating a smoothie bowl is one way to bring excitement to mealtimes. Let kids add their favorite smoothie ingredients like milk, yogurt and berries then give it a whirl, pour into a bowl and decorate with fruit, nuts or seeds.

Kids love to dip. Serving a dip alongside veggies encourages kids to try them. Try blending your favorite herbs and spices with Greek yogurt or cottage cheese for an easy kid-friendly dip.

Teach kids where their food comes from. The more involved a child is in growing and preparing foods, the more likely they are to be engaged around food and try something new. Let kids tend to their own herb pots, take them on a field trip to a local dairy farm or ask them to pick out produce at the farmers market.

Sources