

DAIRY IN YOUR DIET

Dairy products are foods containing milk from mammals, including cattle (dairy cows), goats and sheep. Butter, cheese, yogurt and ice cream are made from milk.

We often use dairy products in foods we prepare: cakes, sauces, omelettes, etc. Dairy is also an ingredient in many prepackaged items available in grocery stores, such as cookies, salad dressings, processed meats and snack foods.



Part of a healthy diet

Dairy products, including milk, cheese and yogurt, are rich in calcium and are also a natural source of other nutrients our bodies need, including protein, vitamin A, B vitamins, potassium, phosphorus, magnesium and zinc. Dairy products help build strong bones, teeth and muscles, helps our blood clot, and makes sure our nerves work well. Consumption of dairy foods is also associated with reduced risk of cardiovascular disease and type 2 diabetes.

All milk sold in Canada has vitamin D added to it. Vitamin D is important in helping the body absorb calcium.

IMPORTANCE OF GETTING ENOUGH CALCIUM

A calcium-rich diet is important for all age groups. How much dairy your body requires depends on your age, with teens and seniors requiring more servings. Dietary calcium contributes to normal growth in children and teenagers and optimizes peak bone mass around the age of 20, after which bone loss slowly overtakes bone building.

For adults, adequate calcium intake helps maintain reserves built up over the years, slows age-related bone loss and minimizes the risk of **osteoporosis**, a disease characterized by low bone mass that increases the risk of fractures. Over 80% of fractures in people 50+ are caused by osteoporosis.¹

It is a myth that in many Asian cultures in which dairy products are not consumed, people do not develop osteoporosis. Projections indicate that by 2050, 50% of hip fractures will occur in Asia.²

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CAN YOU BE ALLERGIC TO MILK?



Milk allergies occur rarely in adults. They occur in 2-4% of infants and are outgrown by most children by the age of 3. A milk allergy is an overreaction of the immune system to one or both proteins in milk: **casein** and **whey**. Reactions can vary from mild to severe. Adults and children who are allergic to milk must eliminate all dairy products and dairy ingredients from their diet.³

Because a dairy allergy can be potentially life-threatening for some people, Health Canada requires food manufacturers to clearly label all pre-packed food products containing milk.⁴



LACTOSE INTOLERANCE

Unlike food allergies, food intolerances do not involve the immune system. People who are **lactose intolerant** don't produce enough of the enzyme lactase, which breaks down lactose, the sugar found in milk. As a result, lactose-intolerant people are unable to digest large amounts of lactose at once.

Without enough of the lactase enzyme, lactose builds up in the colon and can cause symptoms such as gas, bloating, cramps and diarrhea. While lactose intolerance can cause discomfort, it is not life-threatening. Most people with lactose intolerance can still enjoy dairy products through these strategies:



Drinking milk in small portions throughout the day or with meals and snacks



Eating yogurt (contains live bacteria that helps break down lactose)



Eating cheeses such as mozzarella, cheddar, Swiss and brie, which contain almost no lactose



Consuming lactose-free milk



Taking lactase enzyme drops or tablets before eating dairy products



What about plant sources of calcium?

Canadians rely on dairy products as their source of calcium. While some plant foods naturally contribute to our overall calcium intake, eating enough of them daily to meet our calcium needs is challenging. In fact, plant sources of calcium often contain much less calcium than needed, or contain substances that reduce calcium's absorption. For example, to absorb the same amount of calcium provided by 1 cup of milk, you have to eat 8 cups of spinach, more than 2 cups of broccoli, or 1 cup of almonds.⁵ Some food products such as plant-based beverages have calcium added to them but absorption of this calcium may not be as good as that from dairy products.

