



## Dairy & Children: a healthy combination

The importance of milk and dairy products for children and adolescents

- Dairy foods are natural sources of valuable nutrients for children: high quality protein, vitamins and minerals such as calcium, phosphorus and iodine.
- Research shows that dairy has beneficial effects on health beyond its nutritional value.
- Dairy products have an important place in children's diet. They contribute to a good physical and cognitive development, health maintenance and good eating habits for life.

## Dairy helps children to reach essential nutrients dietary recommendations

Milk and dairy are **naturally nutrient-rich foods** because, while they provide relatively few calories, they offer a whole range of **essential nutrients** (like high quality proteins) and make a significant contribution to the daily nutrient intakes for many **vitamins and minerals** like vitamin B12, calcium, magnesium, phosphorus...<sup>(1-3)</sup>. More information in our EDA nutrition factsheet '[Nutrient-rich dairy, an affordable source of nutrition](#)'

Dairy products are considered an important part of a healthy balanced diet<sup>(4)</sup> that contribute to a better nutrient status<sup>(5-7)</sup>. Therefore, dietary advice all over Europe recommends a daily consumption of dairy products during all stages of life. The average recommendations are 3-4 servings of dairy per day (France, Belgium, Ireland, Spain) or 500-600 ml of dairy per day (Denmark, Finland, the Netherlands).

Dairy consumption during childhood plays a vital role. However, **children's overall milk intake is declining**<sup>(8,9)</sup> specially in developed countries through middle childhood and adolescence<sup>(10)</sup>. According to the EsKiMo Study<sup>(11)</sup>, in Germany, less than 50% of the children achieve the recommended daily amounts of dairy. Many children and adolescents do not reach recommendations for dairy, and this leads to insufficient intakes of nutrients such as **calcium, selenium, and iodine**<sup>(12,13)</sup>. Recent observations show already public health effects of this decline.

### EUROPEAN AVERAGE RECOMMENDATIONS OF DAIRY CONSUMPTION

Adults: 2-3 servings/day  
Children: 3-4 servings/day

One serving of dairy:

Milk



150-200ml

Yoghurt



125g

Cheese



20-30g



Including a wide range of milk and dairy foods as a core component of school meals helps children to achieve dietary recommendations and consume a healthy and nutrient-rich diet.

Besides basic plain milk and dairy, **flavoured milks and yoghurts can also be a good way to increase milk consumption** and boosting their vitamin, mineral and protein intake without any adverse impact on weight <sup>(14-16)</sup>; more information in our EDA nutrition factsheet '[Sugar in dairy products](#)'. In some countries, **children that drink flavoured milks have a higher total milk intake** than those who drink regular milk while intake of added sugars does not differ much between those groups <sup>(16)</sup>. A US study showed that removing flavoured milks from schools leads to a decrease in overall milk consumption and negatively impacts children's nutrients intake <sup>(17)</sup>.



## Milk and dairy nutrients are important for children's health

**Dairy nutrient-rich profile** contributes to a good development and functioning of the body and health maintenance from early ages <sup>(18)</sup> and across all life stages: More in EDA nutrition factsheet '[Health benefits and nutritional value of dairy](#)'.

During childhood and adolescence, **bones need high quality protein and calcium** to grow and develop healthily and also to maintain bone health later in life <sup>(19)</sup>. **Both nutrients are naturally abundant in dairy products like milk, cheese and yoghurts.** The health benefits of these products can be communicated to consumers through many authorised EU nutrition and health claims. <sup>(20)(21)</sup>

### DID YOU KNOW ?...

...Dairy calcium is better absorbed than calcium from plant sources <sup>(21)</sup> and accounts for more than 50% of children's total calcium intake in European countries. <sup>(5)</sup>

**Nutrients in dairy are also important for muscles.** High quality proteins in milk and dairy foods contains many essential amino acids and bioactive peptides which may have specific effects on growth <sup>(22)</sup> and contribute to muscle growth and maintenance. <sup>(23)</sup>

Many observational studies also suggest a positive association between dairy intake and **dental health**. Particularly cheese and yoghurt consumption leads to less dental caries in children. <sup>(24,25)</sup>

Related to cardiovascular risks, scientific data shows that **higher dairy intake in early life is associated with lower blood pressure in middle childhood <sup>(26)</sup> or early adolescence <sup>(27)</sup>**. There is also a positive association between yoghurt consumption, including flavoured ones, and diet quality and metabolic profile in children <sup>(28)</sup>.

Recent data shows that more and more children in Europe drink low-fat milk <sup>(10,29,30)</sup>. This can alleviate the concern that energy provided by dairy may contribute to childhood obesity. Dairy products (excluding butter) account for around **10% of total fat intake** in German children aged 1-13 years. <sup>(29)</sup> In the Netherlands, dairy products account for **25% of total energy** while milk alone contributed **around 6% of total energy** to the diet of young children. <sup>(6)</sup> Moreover, a review found **no association between dairy intake and measures of adiposity** (BMI, body fat). <sup>(31)</sup> Another study among adolescents in Portugal also found that those who consumed 2 cups or more of milk per day were significantly less likely to have abdominal obesity than those who consumed less milk. <sup>(32)</sup>

### DID YOU KNOW ?...

...Milk and dairy foods are a very affordable source of essential nutrients. Milk and yoghurt provide excellent nutrition value in relation to cost. <sup>(1)</sup>





## Drinking milk contributes to healthy eating habits for a healthy life



**Milk and dairy are recommended to be part of breakfast at home and childcare facilities** <sup>(33)</sup>. This helps children to develop the taste for milk from the childhood and to **adopt healthy eating habits** later in life, **like reaching dairy intake recommendations and having breakfast every day**. 10-30% of children and adolescents in Europe and in the USA skip breakfast, which may have unfavourable consequences for health and cognitive performance <sup>(33)</sup>. Growing scientific evidence shows that there is a relation between skipping breakfast and nutritional inadequate diets but also with obesity <sup>(34)</sup>. Several studies found **higher milk consumption and calcium intakes in children and adolescents who eat breakfast** <sup>(35,36)</sup>.



**Children's overall milk intake is decreasing** <sup>(8,9,29)</sup> and it is often replaced by **potentially nutrient-poor, energy-dense foods and beverages** <sup>(37,38)</sup> that contain "empty calories". Nutrient-rich foods such as dairy are important for a balanced and healthy diet <sup>(2)</sup>, and replacing them with sweetened beverages leads to an increase in energy intake and to a decrease in calcium intake <sup>(39)</sup>. Studies show a rise in childhood obesity coinciding with a decline in dairy consumption and an increase in sweetened nutrient-poor beverage consumption <sup>(40,41)</sup>.

And dairy products are available in all kinds of taste preferences!

European Dairy Association

[eda.euromilk.org](http://eda.euromilk.org)

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