



Nutrition goals

Dairy foods are more than just nutrients

- Milk and dairy Education about healthy eating should be the key focus of nutrition policies. Healthy eating means eating foods with many essential nutrients relative to the energy they provide, and less intake of empty calories.
- Positive messages about which food we should eat and how to compose a healthy diet should be communicated, instead of messages about nutrients to avoid. We eat foods, not nutrients!
- EU nutrition policies should focus on the total nutrient composition of foods as well as on the contribution of whole foods to a healthy diet in order to achieve effective results regarding public health.
- Dairy foods like milk, yoghurt and cheese are naturally nutrient-rich. Their composition is largely defined by the raw material milk.
- A wide range of natural dairy products, including low-fat options, are available. Everyone can choose a healthy diet with nutritious dairy foods that suit his/her personal needs and preferences.
- Changes to the natural nutrient composition of dairy foods are challenging and limited by several factors.

Focus on education, not reformulation

The focus on certain selected nutrients such as saturated fat, sugars or salt and the reformulation of nutrient composition of foods will not stop the obesity epidemic or solve the current public health problems. Many obese people are actually undernourished because they eat too much and many foods with 'empty' calories, leading in the end to an imbalanced energy intake with an insufficient nutrient intake.

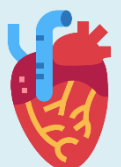
The future EU strategy on nutrition and public health should not focus on reformulation. Instead, focus should be put **on nutrition education** and on the **promotion of a healthy diet and lifestyle**, including physical activity, in order to change consumer behaviour.

Move from nutrients to foods in EU nutrition policies

Looking at a few single nutrients is too simplistic. Science shows that the health effects of single nutrients may depend on the food source. Foods lacking the selected nutrients are not per definition healthy, and foods containing those nutrients are not per definition unhealthy. It is the total nutrient composition that counts. A higher intake of dairy foods, for example, was linked to a lower cardiovascular disease risk ([de Oliveira et al. 2012](#)). This might be explained by the **whole complex matrix of nutrients in dairy foods** and the presence of, for example, antihypertensive minerals like **potassium** and some **bioactive peptides**.

The total nutrient composition of foods and their contribution to a healthy diet should lead public health policy. **This requires a more holistic approach in communicating to consumers what to eat** rather than a reductionist single nutrient approach. Consumers eat and enjoy foods, not nutrients.

A higher intake of dairy foods was linked to a lower cardiovascular disease risk ([de Oliveira et al. 2012](#)).



Dairy foods have a natural origin and nutrient richness

Milk, yoghurt and cheese are naturally nutrient-rich foods. They provide many essential nutrients such as **calcium, phosphorus, magnesium, zinc** and **B-vitamins**, as well as **high-quality protein** while providing relatively few calories. Dairy foods have a complex matrix, the composition and nutrient content of which is largely defined by the composition of the natural raw material milk. Dairy foods with reduced fat content keep their natural composition and still contain the same amounts of nutrients than in the standard products except for the fat-soluble vitamin A.



A wide range of dairy products is already available

Milks with different fat levels have existed for decades – **whole, semi-skimmed and skimmed milks have been defined in EU law since 1971**. Most people in Europe drink semi-skimmed milk. Constant efforts from the dairy industry have resulted in a wide range of dairy products and low-fat varieties exist in all product categories: **milk, yoghurt, fermented milk, cheese, cream** and **butter**.

Whole, semi-skimmed and skimmed milks have been defined in EU law since 1971.



There is a continuous product development to innovate dairy products according to consumer demand. The broad range of existing dairy products already enables European consumers to compose a healthy and balanced diet including nutritious dairy foods according to their individual needs and preferences.

The complexity of reformulation

Reformulation is an umbrella term that covers many different production processes which are highly dependent on the food and/or food category subjected to reformulation.

For example, the addition of nutrients or fortification is a rather easy way to change the composition of foods. The removal of nutrients, like fat from milk to produce semi-skimmed and skimmed milk and milk products, requires more advanced techniques but has long been performed by the dairy industry.

However, for other dairy products such as cheese, there are technological barriers that hinder extensive changes to the nutritional composition and the traditional production process. For example, it is challenging to reduce the amount of salt contained in cheese as salting is an integral part of the traditional cheese making process and a key factor for food safety. In addition, in (semi)hard cheeses salt is essential for a good texture of the cheese. Cheeses with too low salt cannot be properly sliced or grated, which makes handling by consumers and industrial uses difficult. Therefore, there is a technological limit to the reduction of salt in cheeses.

The current EU legal framework that has been developed to recognize the specificity of dairy products – also in terms of nutritional composition – needs to be considered. [EU Regulation 1234/2007](#) contains protected designations for milk and milk products. Dairy specific Codex standards and national legislations in EU Member States also exist.

Possible adaptations to the nutritional composition of dairy products, including fat and salt content, are done according to consumer needs and preferences. But changing the natural composition of dairy products also changes their taste, texture, etc. Consumer acceptance for reformulated products might be reduced when they are not palatable. Consumers might hence lose out on nutrients when not eating dairy.

