



Nutrition Factsheet

March 2018

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DAIRY AND 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^a** because, while they provide relatively few calories, they offer a whole range of **essential nutrients** (e.g. high quality proteins) and make a significant contribution to the daily nutrient intakes for many **vitamins and minerals** such as vitamin B12 and B2, calcium, phosphorus and iodine(1-3).
- Dairy products are considered an important part of a healthy balanced diet (4) that contribute to a better nutrient status (5-7). 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) (Figure 1).

EUROPEAN AVERAGE RECOMMENDATIONS OF DAIRY CONSUMPTION

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

One serving of dairy:

Milk

Yoghurt

Cheese



150-200ml



125g



20-30g

Figure 1. Average recommendations of dairy intake.



- Dairy consumption during childhood plays a vital role. However, **children's overall milk intake is declining** (8,9) specially in developed countries through middle childhood and adolescence (10). According to the EsKiMo Study (11), 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** (12,13). Recent observations show already public health effects of this decline (14-16).

^a ["More in EDA nutrition factsheet "Nutrient-rich dairy, an affordable source of nutrition"](#)



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- 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, studies show that having a wide variety of **flavoured milks and yoghurts can help to increase milk consumption** and boosting their vitamin, mineral and protein intake without any adverse impact on weight (17-20)^b. A variety of studies also show that a frequent consumption of yoghurt is related with a better diet overall (19,20,21). 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 (22). Children who drink both plain and flavoured milk have significantly higher intakes of vitamin A, calcium, phosphorus, magnesium, potassium than those who only drink plain milk (22). 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 (23).



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 (24) and across all life stages^c. 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 (25). **Both nutrients are naturally abundant in dairy products such as milk, cheese and yoghurts.** The health benefits of these products can be communicated to consumers through many authorised EU nutrition and health claims (26).
- Iodine, a nutrient that can be found in milk and cheese, plays an important role in children’s normal growth (16).

DID YOU KNOW...
 ...Dairy calcium is better absorbed than calcium from plant sources (27) and accounts for more than 50% of children’s total calcium intake in European countries (5).

- **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 (28) and contribute to muscle growth and maintenance (29).

- 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 (30,31). Concerning cardiovascular risks, scientific data shows that **higher dairy**



^bMore in EDA nutrition factsheet “[Sugar in dairy products](#)”

^cMore in EDA nutrition factsheet “[Health benefits and nutritional value of dairy](#)”



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intake in early life is associated with lower blood pressure in middle childhood (32) or early adolescence (33). There is also a positive association between yoghurt consumption, including flavoured ones, and diet quality and metabolic profile in children (34).

- Recent data shows that more and more children in Europe drink low-fat milk (10,35,36). This can alleviate the concern that energy provided by dairy may contribute to childhood obesity. Dairy products (excluding butter) account for about **10% of total fat intake** in German children aged 1-13 years (35). 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 (6). Moreover, a recent review found **no association between dairy intake and measures of adiposity** (BMI, body fat) (37). 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 (38).

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 (1).



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** (39). 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 (39). Growing scientific evidence shows that there is a relation between skipping breakfast and nutritional inadequate diets as well as with obesity (40). Several studies found **higher milk consumption and calcium intakes in children and adolescents who eat breakfast** (41,42).



Dairy products are available in all kind of taste preferences



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- **Children's overall milk intake is decreasing (8,9,35) and it is often replaced by potentially nutrient-poor, energy-dense foods and beverages (43,44) that contain "empty calories".** Nutrient-rich foods such as dairy are important for a balanced and healthy diet (2), and replacing them with sweetened beverages leads to an increase in energy intake and to a decrease in calcium intake (45). Studies show a rise in childhood obesity coinciding with a decline in dairy consumption and an increase in sweetened, nutrient-poor, beverages consumption (46,47).





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