

The Benefits of Yogurt

What's tasty, easy, and has lots of health benefits? Yogurt!

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WebMD Weight Loss Clinic - Expert Column

Have you noticed that the yogurt section of most grocery stores has practically taken over the dairy aisle? It's getting harder to find more traditional dairy foods, such as cottage cheese and sour cream, amid the sea of yogurt options. But it only makes sense that a food with as many health benefits as yogurt be given prime real estate in the supermarket.

And just what are the health benefits of yogurt?

First off, let us not forget that yogurt comes from milk. So yogurt eaters will get a dose of animal protein (about 9 grams per 6-ounce serving), plus several other nutrients found in dairy foods, like calcium, vitamin B-2, vitamin B-12, potassium, and magnesium.

But one of the words we're hearing more and more of regarding yogurt is "[probiotics](#)." Probiotics are "friendly bacteria" that are naturally present in [the digestive system](#). Live strains of these "good bacteria" are also found in many yogurt products. While more research needs to be done, there's some evidence that some strains of probiotics can help boost the immune system and promote a healthy digestive tract.

Probiotics made news recently when a class action lawsuit was filed against the Dannon Co. over marketing for its Activia and DanActive products, in which the company uses trademarked probiotic strains. Activia is a yogurt marketed as being "clinically proven to help regulate the digestive system when eaten daily for two weeks," while DanActive is a drink marketed as being "clinically proven to help strengthen the body's defense systems," according to company websites.

The lawsuit, filed by a California law firm, alleges that Dannon engaged in a "massively deceptive" advertising campaign about those products' "clinically" and "scientifically" proven health benefits not available in other yogurts. But Dannon is challenging the suit. "The scientifically substantiated benefits of Dannon's products are confirmed not only by the scientific journals that have reviewed and published the findings, but also by the millions of highly satisfied consumers who enjoy Dannon's products," the company says in a news release.

Regardless of this dispute, the health benefits of yogurt are so impressive that many health-conscious people make it a daily habit. An each year, more and more research is published adding insight into the health benefits from eating yogurt.

Here are six possible health benefits to having some yogurt each day:

Benefit No. 1: Yogurt With Active Cultures May Help the Gut

While more study is needed, there's some evidence that yogurt with active cultures may help certain gastrointestinal conditions, including:

- [Lactose intolerance](#)
 - [Constipation](#)
 - [Diarrhea](#)
 - [Colon cancer](#)
- Inflammatory bowel disease
 - *H. pylori* infection

That's what researchers from the Jean Mayer U.S. Department of Agriculture Human Nutrition Research Center on Aging at Tufts University concluded in a review article. The benefits are thought to be due to:

- Changes in the microflora of the gut
 - The time food takes to go through the bowel.
- Enhancement of the body's immune system (more on this below).

In another recent study, the type of diarrhea that some people get after taking antibiotics was found to be reduced when the study participants drank a drink containing three particular probiotics (*L. casei*, *L. bulgaricus*, and *S. thermophilus*).

Benefit No. 2: Some Probiotic Strains May Boost the Immune System

While much also remains to be learned about probiotics and the immune system, recent studies suggest that certain probiotic strains offer some benefits:

- One review article suggests probiotics may help with inflammatory bowel disease by changing the intestinal microflora and lessening the immune system response that can worsen the disease.
- Another study indicated probiotics may enhance resistance to and recovery from infection. In research on elderly people, researchers found that the duration of all illnesses was significantly lower in a group that consumed a certain probiotic found in fermented milk. They reported a possible 20% reduction in the length of winter infections (including gastrointestinal and respiratory infections).
- Yogurt containing two probiotics, lactobacillus and bifidobacterium, was found to improve the success of drug therapy (using four specific medications) on 138 people with persistent *H. pylori* infections, according to a recent Taiwanese study. *H. pylori* is a bacterium that can cause infection in the stomach and upper part of the small intestine. It can lead to ulcers and can increase the risk of developing [stomach cancer](#) as well.

Benefit No. 3: Yogurt With Active Cultures May Discourage Vaginal Infections

Candida or "yeast" vaginal infections are a common problem for women with [diabetes](#). In a small study, seven diabetic women with chronic candidal [vaginitis](#) consumed 6 ounces of frozen aspartame-sweetened yogurt per day (with or without active cultures).

Even though most of the women had poor blood sugar control throughout the study, the vaginal pH (measure of acidity or basicity) of the group eating yogurt with active cultures dropped from 6.0 to 4.0 (normal pH is 4.0-4.5). These women also reported a decrease in candida infections. The women eating the yogurt without active cultures remained at pH 6.0.

Benefit No. 4: Yogurt May Help Prevent Osteoporosis

"Adequate nutrition plays a major role in the prevention and treatment of [osteoporosis](#), and the micronutrients of greatest importance are calcium and vitamin D," says Jeri Nieves, PhD, MS, director of bone density testing at New York's Helen Hayes Hospital.

Calcium has been shown to have beneficial effects on bone mass in people of all ages, although the results are not always consistent, says Nieves, also an assistant professor of clinical epidemiology at Columbia University.

"The combination of calcium and vitamin D has a clear skeletal benefit, provided the dose of vitamin D is sufficiently high," she adds.

And what qualifies as "sufficiently high?"

Currently, 400 IU per day is considered an adequate intake of vitamin D for people ages 51-70, Nieves says. (Look for the Daily Value amount listed on food labels.) But more may be better.

"This amount is likely to be sufficient for most young adults for skeletal health, although many would argue that for overall health, more than the 400 IU may be required, even at these younger ages," Nieves said in an email interview.

Nieves believes that older people specifically can benefit from more vitamin D.

Many dairy products, including some yogurts, are made with added vitamin D. Find out which brands have added vitamin D by checking out the table below, and by reading labels when you shop.

Benefit No. 5: Yogurt May Reduce the Risk of High Blood Pressure

One study, which followed more than 5,000 university graduates in Spain for about two years, found a link between dairy intake and risk of [high blood pressure](#).

Dannon Creamy Fruit Blends, Strawberry flavor	170	1.5	1	10	70%	20%	-
Dannon Activia, Blueberry flavor	165	3	1.5	7.5	62%	23%	-
Yoplait Original 99% Fat Free, Fruit flavored	170	1.5	1	10	63%	20%	20%
Yoplait Yo Plus Raspberry	165	2.2	1.5	15	58%	23%	15%
Stonyfield Farms Organic Low-Fat, Fruit flavored	130	1.5	1	5	68%	25%	-

"LIGHT" YOGURT (6 ounces)	Calories	Fat (g)	Saturated fat (g)	Cholesterol (mg)	% Calories from sugar	Calcium (% Daily Value)	Vitamin D (% Daily Value)
Dannon Light 'n Fit, Fruit flavored	60	0	0	<5	47%	20%	20%
Dannon Light & Fit 0% Fat Plus	75	0	0	<5	56%	15%	15%
Dannon Activia Light Fat Free Raspberry	105	0	0	<5	46%	22.5%	-
Yoplait Light, Fruit flavored	100	0	0	<5	56%	20%	20%
Yoplait Fiber One Nonfat Yogurt (with 5 grams fiber)	120	0	0	<5	55%	15%	22.5%
Yoplait Fiber One Nonfat Yogurt (with 5 grams fiber)	100	.5	0	5	48%	30%	30%

2. Choose Your Sweetener

The other decision is whether you want [artificial sweeteners](#) (which are used in most "light" yogurts) or whether you're OK with most of the calories coming from sugar. If you are sensitive to aftertastes, you may want to avoid light yogurts. If you don't mind NutraSweet, there are lots of light yogurts to choose from, and all taste pretty good.

3. Look for Active Cultures and Probiotics

To make sure your yogurt contains active cultures, check the label. Most brands will have a graphic that says "live and active cultures." If you want to know which specific active cultures your yogurt contains, look to the label again. Under the list of ingredients, many brands list the specific active cultures. And different cultures are thought to have different benefits.

4. Team Yogurt With Flaxseed

Get in the habit of stirring in a tablespoon of ground flaxseed every time you reach for a yogurt. A tablespoon of ground flaxseed will add almost 3 grams of fiber and

approximately 2 grams of healthy plant omega-3s, according to the product label on Premium Gold brand ground golden flaxseed.

5. Look for Vitamin D

When enjoying calcium-rich yogurt, why not choose one that also boosts your intake of vitamin D? Some brands list 0% of the Daily Value for vitamin D; others have 20%. (See the table above.)

6. Make Yogurt Part of the Perfect Snack

Make the perfect snack by pairing high-protein yogurt with a high-fiber food like fruit (fresh or frozen) and/or a high-fiber breakfast cereal. You can find many lower-sugar breakfast cereals with 4 or more grams of fiber per serving.

7. Whip Up a Creamier Smoothie With Yogurt

Make your smoothie creamy and thick by adding yogurt instead of ice cream or frozen yogurt. Cup for cup, light and low-fat yogurt is higher in protein and calcium than light ice cream. It's also usually lower in fat, saturated fat, and calories.

8. Customize Your Yogurt

If you want to create your own flavored yogurt, start with your favorite plain yogurt and stir in all sorts of foods and flavors. Here are a few ideas:

- Add chopped strawberries (1/4 cup) and 1/8 teaspoon of vanilla extract to 6 ounces of plain yogurt to make Strawberries and Cream Yogurt.
- Add canned crushed pineapple (1/8 cup) and a tablespoon of flaked or shredded coconut to 6 ounces of plain yogurt to make Pina Colada Yogurt.
- Add 1 tablespoon of cool espresso or extra-strong coffee and 1 tablespoon of chocolate syrup to 6 ounces of plain yogurt to make Mochaccino Yogurt.
- Add 1/4 cup chopped orange segments or mandarin oranges and 1 tablespoon reduced-sugar orange marmalade to 6 ounces of plain yogurt to make Orange Burst Yogurt.

9. Eat Yogurt at Work

Buy some yogurt and keep it in the office refrigerator (don't forget to put your name on it). On those days when you need a morning or afternoon snack, that yogurt will be ready for you.

10. Use Yogurt in Recipes

Yogurt works as a substitute ingredient in all sorts of [recipes](#). Plain yogurt can take the place of sour cream in a pinch (over baked potatoes or garnishing enchiladas). You can

also substitute a complementary flavor of yogurt for some of the oil or butter called for in a muffin, brownie, or cake recipe. It can replace all of the fat called for in cake mixes, too.

<http://www.medicinenet.com/script/main/art.asp?articlekey=79753>