

# The Importance of Milk and Milk Products for Students at School

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School meals play a critical role in the lives of all California students. Breakfast, lunch and after-school snacks provide all students with nutrient-rich foods for health, well-being and—most importantly for schools—fuel for academic success. For students with unreliable food supplies, school meals often provide the majority of their daily nutritional needs.

The Healthy, Hunger-Free Kids Act of 2010, USDA's Proposed Rule for Nutrition Standards, and celebrity involvement have focused intense national and local attention on school nutrition programs. Considerable discussion, as well as confusion and disagreement, surround the appropriate roles for Milk & Milk Products in school meals. This paper briefly reviews four critical issues in children's nutrition and health and then provides key messages about milk, cheese and yogurt in schools.

## Healthy Weight

Pediatric experts recognize that energy balance is the key to a healthy weight during childhood. Appropriate caloric intake and daily physical activity are both important for a child's normal growth and development. In terms of food intake, the goal is to provide more nutrient-rich foods like Milk & Milk Products and others shown on USDA's MyPlate ([www.ChooseMyPlate.gov](http://www.ChooseMyPlate.gov)) in age-appropriate portion sizes, while decreasing nutrient-poor foods such as soft drinks, salty snacks and candy.

## Missing Nutrients

The 2010 Dietary Guidelines for Americans (DGA) recognizes four nutrients of public health concern for children (and adults): calcium, vitamin D, potassium and dietary fiber. Milk is the number one source of the first three for Americans. Fat-free and low-fat Milk & Milk Products were recommended in the DGA as sources of many nutrients for relatively few calories. In addition to helping to fill children's gaps in calcium, vitamin D and potassium, Milk & Milk Products also provide protein, vitamins A and B12, riboflavin, phosphorus, magnesium and zinc.

## Bone Health

The 2010 DGA also noted that the intake of Milk & Milk Products is linked to better bone health, especially in children and adolescents. While the importance of Milk & Milk Products for building

healthy bones is well recognized, many young people do not consume the recommended daily amounts: 2 ½ cups for children ages 4–8 and 3 cups for Americans 9 years of age and older.

## Lactose Intolerance

Many families unnecessarily avoid Milk & Milk Products due to concerns about lactose intolerance. Avoiding Milk & Milk Products often means getting fewer key nutrients such as calcium, vitamin D and potassium. Fortunately, research shows many ways to handle lactose malabsorption, including enjoying smaller amounts of Milk & Milk Products at a time and switching to lactose-free milk.

## Key Messages about Milk and Milk Products at School

For breakfast, lunch and after-school snacks, Milk & Milk Products offer the nutrients kids need in the delicious flavors they love to eat and drink. It's not nutrition until kids consume it! Foods or drinks left on trays are not healthful—they go into the trash. Fortunately, school nutrition professionals know how to make good-for-you foods appealing to their young customers. Here are key messages to use with district staff, families and the media regarding the importance of Milk & Milk Products in your school.

## Milk

- Fluid milk (8 ounces) must be offered with school breakfast and lunch meals. It may be offered as one of the optional components for after-school snacks.
- Under the new USDA Proposed Rule, fluid milk must be low-fat (1 percent or less, unflavored) or fat-free (unflavored or flavored).
- Both flavored and unflavored milk contain the same package of important nutrients that helps to fill gaps in children's intake of calcium, vitamin D and potassium—three of the four “nutrients of public health concern.”
- Both flavored and unflavored milk contain the same 12–15 grams (per 8 ounces) of natural milk sugar. The amount of added sugar in flavored milk has been significantly reduced over the past five years—to an average of only 10–12 grams (3 teaspoons or less) per 8-ounce cup.

- Currently only 3 percent of the sugar in children’s diets comes from flavored milk. Only 28 percent of milk consumed by 2- to 11-year-olds is flavored, and only 17 percent of milk consumed by adolescents (12- to 19-year-olds) is flavored.
- Multiple surveys have shown that kids drink more milk when they have a choice of low-fat, fat-free, flavored and unflavored milks from which to choose.

## Cheese

- Cheese is a nutrient-rich food for children. Like other Milk & Milk Products, it can help children fill their nutrient gaps for calcium, vitamin D and potassium, as well as provide other key nutrients such as protein, riboflavin and magnesium.
- On school menus, cheese can count as protein in a breakfast, lunch or snack. Kids love cheese on pizza, as well as having smaller amounts of cheese added to their favorite tacos, wraps and sandwiches.

- Low-fat/part-skim mozzarella cheeses are popular, smart choices on pizza and as string cheese snacks. Many companies are developing new cheeses for schools, with maximum flavor and lower fat and sodium content.

## Yogurt

- In school meal programs, yogurt can be used as all or part of the meats/meat alternates component. This is a reflection of the protein content of yogurt.
- Four ounces (1/2 cup) of yogurt counts as 1 ounce of a protein requirement in a school breakfast, lunch or after-school snack. Yogurt may be plain or flavored, unsweetened or sweetened.
- Children like the creamy flavor of yogurt in smoothies and parfaits made at school. Frozen yogurt, drinkable yogurt, homemade yogurt, yogurt bars and yogurt-covered fruits and/or nuts may not be served in reimbursable meals.

**For more information about Milk & Milk Products, visit [www.DairyCouncilofCA.org](http://www.DairyCouncilofCA.org).**

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