

YUMMY YOGURT

Having so many choices at the grocery store can sometimes be detrimental. It certainly complicates the process of being an informed consumer. Some people may make less healthy choices because there are just too many options or inadequate time to read and compare the nutritional labels. This is especially true at the dairy case with the available yogurt options.

Yogurt is a popular food item with an ancient history. It has been a basic food in many parts of Asia, the Middle East, and Eastern Europe for centuries. It is thought that yogurt was first made by nomadic tribes in the Balkans thousands of years ago and occurred as a mistake while trying to preserve milk. Although it has been commercially produced in the United States since the 1940s, yogurt did not become a popular food in America until the 1970s. Now the grocery stores provide an amazing array of brands, flavors, and styles of yogurt.

According to the National Yogurt Association, the words "live and active cultures" refer to the living organisms, *Lactobacillus bulgaricus* and *Streptococcus thermophilus*, which convert milk -either whole, reduced-fat, lowfat or nonfat- to yogurt during fermentation. The milk is pasteurized before culturing to remove any harmful bacteria. The process is very similar to the one used when making beer, wine or cheese, in that beneficial organisms ferment and transform the basic food. This fermentation process is what creates yogurt, with its unique taste, texture and healthful attributes.

Yogurt is a nutritious food. One cup provides 30 to 50 percent of most adults' daily need for calcium. Yogurt is also packed with high-quality protein, magnesium and a variety of vitamins. Numerous health benefits beyond its nutritional value have been associated with consuming yogurt.

Foods that have live bacteria in them are called probiotics, and yogurt is one of the best known probiotic foods. We naturally have bacteria in our intestines, and the key is to increase the health-promoting, friendly bacteria. The bacteria found in yogurt can actually help to inhibit the growth of some harmful bacteria.

The beneficial bacteria in yogurt can also help to boost the immune system, enhance digestion, and increase mineral absorption. Scientists have found that intake of yogurt with active cultures may fight other sources of infection and may protect against some cancers. For those who cannot tolerate milk because of lactose, which is the sugar in milk, yogurt is usually well-tolerated. Sweetened fruit yogurt is somewhat less nutritious because the fruit and sugar, usually preserves, takes up space in the cup, so you get more sugar and less yogurt. Buying plain yogurt, either low-fat or nonfat, is your healthiest options. You can save money by avoiding the individual cartons and purchasing the larger containers, too. Plain yogurt is versatile and can be used in numerous ways.

The newest choice available in the yogurt section is Greek yogurt. This is a more concentrated yogurt than what we are used to. Manufacturers strain the yogurt and remove some of the whey. This produces a thicker, creamier yogurt with more fat, protein, and calcium. Just like regular yogurt, reduced fat and fat-free versions are available.

You can make your own "Greek" yogurt by straining regular yogurt. Line a colander or strainer with cheesecloth, paper towels, or paper coffee filters and place the colander in a large bowl. Spoon the

yogurt into the lined colander, cover it with plastic wrap, and refrigerate for at least three hours. The whey will drain into the bowl and should be discarded. Depending on how long the yogurt is drained, you can have a product that can be substituted for sour cream or cream cheese.

Here are some ideas for using yogurt:

- Use plain yogurt as a marinade for chicken
- Add a couple of drops of vanilla extract to plain yogurt to create vanilla yogurt
- Make a smoothie by placing yogurt, several ice cubes, and fruit of your choice in a blender; Process until thick and smooth. Serve immediately
- Use in place of sour cream in mashed potatoes or on baked potatoes
- Use yogurt in place of all or some of the mayonnaise or salad dressing for potato, egg, tuna, or chicken salad
- Use yogurt in place of milk on your breakfast cereal

Whatever your yogurt choice, there are many ways to use yogurt. From dips to salad dressings to desserts, here are some recipe ideas to get you started.

Yogurt Salad Dressing - Makes 8 servings - 2 tablespoons each

8 ounces plain, fat-free yogurt	2 tablespoons dill, dried
1/4 cup fat-free mayonnaise	2 tablespoons lemon juice
2 tablespoons chives, fresh or dried	

Mix all ingredients in a bowl, cover and refrigerate for at least an hour in the refrigerator. You could substitute white wine vinegar for the lemon juice.

Nutrition information per serving: 23 Calories; 0g Total Fat; 4g Carbohydrate; 0g dietary fiber; 1mg cholesterol; 2g protein, 72mg calcium; 84mg sodium.

Salsa Yogurt Dip

Mix two parts plain yogurt with one part salsa (for example, mix 1 cup plain yogurt with 1/2 cup salsa.)

Creamy Peanut Dip

1/4 cup creamy peanut butter
2 tablespoons orange juice
1/2 cup yogurt, low fat vanilla

In a small bowl, mix the peanut butter and orange juice until smooth. Stir in the vanilla yogurt. Cover and put in the fridge until chilled.

Yogurt Popsicles

If you have a blender, you can make yogurt popsicles. Drain the liquid from a 16-ounce package of defrosted frozen fruit or a can of fruit. Put the fruit into a saucepan. Add a tablespoon of unflavored gelatin. Heat slowly, stirring until the gelatin dissolves. Put in a blender container with 2 cups of plain yogurt. Blend together. Pour into paper cups. Insert plastic spoons as handles. Cover with aluminum foil to keep handles in place and freeze.

Cauliflower in Yogurt-Cumin Sauce - Makes 3 servings

1-1/2 cups fresh peas, shelled and washed	2 tbsp fresh cilantro, chopped
1 cup water	2 tsp lemon juice
2 cups small cauliflower florets	1/8 tsp ground cumin, optional
1/8 tsp salt	1 dash white pepper
1/2 cup plain low-fat yogurt	

Bring water to a boil in a large saucepan; add peas and cauliflower. Cover and cook for 7 minutes or until crisp-tender. Drain well and place in a bowl. Add salt and toss well. Combine yogurt, cilantro, lemon juice, cumin and white pepper; stir well. Pour yogurt mix over cauliflower mix and toss gently. Serve.

Options: Thaw and use frozen peas instead of fresh peas... Try using fresh parsley instead of cilantro... Substitute black pepper for white pepper... Add celery or cucumber.

Nutrition Facts per serving: 70 calories; 0.5 g total fat; 260 mg sodium; 13 g total carbohydrate; 4 g dietary fiber;

Honey Yogurt Fruit Dip

1 cup nonfat or lowfat yogurt	1/2 teaspoon cinnamon
1 teaspoon vanilla	2 to 3 tablespoons honey

Mix yogurt with vanilla and cinnamon. Add honey to taste, until desired sweetness is obtained.

Tip: This recipe also may be used as a salad dressing.

Cocoa-Berry Yogurt Tarts

1 1/2 cups low-fat vanilla yogurt	6 graham cracker tart shells
1 1/2 cups reduced fat ricotta cheese	3/4 cup fruit (sliced strawberries, raspberries, or blueberries)
2 tablespoons sugar	
2 tablespoons unsweetened cocoa powder	

Mix yogurt, ricotta, sugar, and cocoa powder thoroughly with whisk until creamy. Spoon 1/6 of the mixture into each tart shell and top with berries.

Nutritional Facts per serving: 260 calories, 9 g total fat; 3 g saturated fat; 250 mg sodium, 3 g dietary fiber; 37 g carbohydrates.

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