

Got Flavored Milk?

Clearing up common misconceptions

Beverage choices can play an important role in the overall quality of a child's diet. Flavored milk has long been considered a favorite among children, but you may wonder whether it is nutritious. The following is intended to answer some common questions about flavored milk.

Q: Is flavored milk good for children?

A: Because flavored milk is a good source of high-quality protein and offers children a package of essential nutrients including calcium, magnesium, potassium and vitamin D, it is considered a nutrient-rich beverage that supplies many of the nutrients that children commonly under-consume.

The American Academy of Pediatrics recommends the following daily intake of calcium for bone health:

Daily Calcium Needs

Age	Calcium need (mg per day)	Servings of milk to meet need
4-8 years	800	3 servings
9-18 years	1,300	4 servings

Flavored milk, which is appealing to children and teens, contains as much calcium as regular milk and is a great way to help them meet the recommended three to four calcium servings daily.

Q. Does flavored milk have the same amount of calcium and vitamin D as regular 100 percent milk?

A. Just one serving of flavored or unflavored 100 percent milk provides about 300 mg calcium, or approximately one-third of a child's recommended daily calcium intake and one-quarter of an adolescent's recommended intake.

Vitamin D is generally fortified in flavored milk at the same level as it is in unflavored milk and milk is one of the most common food sources. Adequate amounts of vitamin D are critical for calcium absorption and maintaining strong bones. In light of recent reports of increased fractures in adolescents and a resurgence in cases of rickets among young children—caused by vitamin D deficiency—ensuring an adequate intake of vitamin D is very important.

Q. Isn't there a lot of sugar added to flavored milk?

A. Flavored 100 percent milk does contain some added sugar. However, most of the carbohydrate (sugar) listed on the nutrient label is lactose, the natural sugar found in milk. Flavored milk contains an equivalent of two to four teaspoons of added sugar, or an additional 30 to 60 calories, per serving.

In comparison, regular sodas contain up to eight teaspoons of added sugar per serving and fruit drinks, perceived by many to be "healthy," contain an equivalent of six to nine teaspoons of sugar per serving.

Q. Do the extra calories in flavored milk cause children to gain weight?

A. With so many high-sugar foods and drinks available, concern about possible weight gain is understandable. However, research has shown that consumption of flavored 100 percent milk does not put children at a greater risk for consuming additional calories that may lead to weight gain.

Researchers suggest that children's sugar intake does not increase with the consumption of flavored milk because the consumption of soda and fruit drinks declines as milk consumption increases. If you are watching your child's calorie intake, you could select flavored milk that is low fat or fat free.

Q. Is there a connection between eating three servings of dairy foods each day and weight loss?

A. Emerging research suggests that three servings of milk and dairy products each day, as part of a reduced-calorie weight loss plan, can help adults lose more weight by burning more fat than just cutting calories alone. Observational research has found that dairy may play a role in promoting a healthy weight or preventing unhealthy weight gain among children and adolescents.

Q. Is flavored milk OK for people who are lactose intolerant?

A. Scientific research on this topic has shown that for individuals with lactose intolerance, flavored milk, such as chocolate, may even be better tolerated than unflavored milk. Health experts do not recommend that individuals with lactose intolerance eliminate milk and dairy products from their diet but rather consume moderate amounts to alleviate possible discomfort.

Q. Do the sugar and caffeine in chocolate milk cause hyperactivity?

A. An eight-ounce serving of chocolate milk has less sugar than a comparable serving in cola and about the same as an equivalent serving of orange juice. An eight-ounce serving of chocolate milk has only about one-tenth of the amount of caffeine found in cola drinks and coffee. So, unless a child is extremely sensitive to sugar and/or caffeine, consuming flavored milk will not affect his or her behavior or activity level.

Q. I understand that many schools are developing policies or standards that determine which foods can be served on campus. Does flavored milk meet those requirements?

A. The composition of nutrients in most flavored 100 percent milk products meets the criteria for acceptable beverages under California Senate Bills 12 and 965. In addition, offering flavored 100 percent milk as part of school meal programs has been shown to increase milk and nutrient intake, as well as overall school lunch participation.