

Nutrition Notes - JUNE 2019



Joan Kortbein
Registered Dietitian
Certified Diabetes Educator

June in Wisconsin is a great time of the year. The temperature is rising, daylight hours are the longest of the year, and it is the month to celebrate dairy products! Milk, yogurt, cheese, cottage cheese and ice cream not only taste great but they add lots of nutrients to our diets like calcium, protein, riboflavin, vitamin B 12, phosphorus and magnesium. Too often dairy foods seem to get left out of our diet when we are trying to lose weight or lower our cholesterol. But low fat dairy foods are still heart healthy such as:



- ◆ *skim or 1% milk*
- ◆ *skim-milk cheeses: Farmer, Swiss Lace, mozzarella, string cheese*
- ◆ *fat free or 1% milkfat cottage cheese*
- ◆ *fat free or low fat yogurt*

One dairy food that is gaining more popularity for its nutrition is yogurt. Technically, yogurt is produced by the bacterial fermentation of milk or milk that has been soured and thickened by lactic acid producing cultures added to milk. Doesn't that sound delicious? But the cultures, more commonly known as probiotics, in yogurt are being found provide a growing number of health benefits.

There are different types of bacteria, but those in yogurt can include *Lactobacillus bulgaricus*, *Streptococcus thermophiles*, *Lactobacillus casei*, *Lactobacillus acidophilus*, and *Bifidus*. Research is being done to see if a certain type of bacteria may help specific conditions such as irritable bowel syndrome or inflammatory bowel disease (*Crohn's or Ulcerative Colitis*). If you want to make sure your yogurt or other foods contains probiotics look for this symbol. 



So what are probiotics and why are they good for us? Probiotics are live bacteria and yeasts that are good for your health, especially our gut. Our body naturally contains bacteria – both good and bad. When we think about bacteria we normally think of it as bad, but the natural bacteria in yogurt can help our body maintain a healthy balance of good bacteria that may help with digestion, boost our immune system, improve and/or prevent diarrhea from taking antibiotics, and may even improve diarrhea caused by viruses and parasites. Some research now is showing probiotics may also help skin conditions like eczema, help prevent or treat urinary tract infections and vaginal yeast infections, and may even protect us from colorectal cancer. Earlier this year I attended a diabetes education conference and one of the speakers said studies are being done to see if adding yogurt in the diets of toddlers, especially following illness – with or without antibiotics – could prevent Type 1 diabetes due to a healthier environment in the gut and better immune system.

So what about Greek yogurt? Greek yogurt is still made of milk and live cultures, it is simply strained more to remove more liquid resulting in a higher protein, lower carbohydrate product. Beware of the sugar content of some yogurts. Plain, fat free yogurt is great if you like the flavor. If not, you can add cut up fruit, nuts, flax seed, dry cereal, cinnamon or a drop of honey to flavor. Read the labels for sugar content on flavored yogurts. Regular yogurt contains about 18 grams of sugar per cup and Greek yogurt contains about 10 grams of sugar per cup from the natural sugar, lactose, in milk. Anything above that is from added sugars so choose those with the lowest amount of sugar when comparing labels.

Yogurt is a very versatile food. It makes a great snack or addition to your meal. Plain, low fat yogurt can also be used in place of sour cream for dips, substituted for the fat in recipes when making nut breads like banana bread/muffins or cakes, or added to fruit smoothies for additional protein.

So what do you do if you don't like yogurt, but want a probiotic? Probiotics are in other foods like buttermilk and kefir. You can also buy probiotic supplements, like acidophilus, over the counter at any pharmacy.