



5 Reasons to Start Eating Full-Fat Dairy, According to Science

It's time to skip skim to lose weight, cut your risk of chronic diseases and live a bit healthier.



By [K. Aleisha Fetters](#), Contributor Oct. 28, 2016, at 9:00 a.m

AS MUCH AS WE'VE COZIED up to the idea of "healthy" fats, cooking with olive oil, topping our burgers with avocado and eating almonds by the handful in the name of better health – most of us still get pretty squeamish about which [milk](#) carton we choose.

"Drinking whole milk will make you gain weight." "Cheese and butter are bad for your heart." "Yogurt is good, but always opt for no-fat varieties to save calories." You've undoubtedly heard (if not uttered) all of these statements before.

But how true are they, really? Emerging research suggests not very. Here are five major – and majorly surprising – benefits of choosing [full-fat milk](#), yogurt, cheese and even ice cream!

1. Easier Weight Loss

Let's repeat: Fat does not make you fat. No, not even dairy fat. For instance, a 2013 review published in the European Journal of Nutrition found that people who eat full-fat dairy [tend to be leaner](#) than those who opt for low-fat versions. And in a 2016-released long-term study of 18,438 middle-aged

women, consumption of [high-fat dairy](#), but not low-fat dairy, was associated with reduced likelihood of becoming overweight through the years.

That may be because [fat](#) is an incredibly satiating nutrient, filling you up, slowing down the release of sugars into your bloodstream and helping to prevent overeating, explains Brian Quebbemann, a bariatric surgeon with the [Chapman Medical Center](#) in California and president of The N.E.W. Program. "By eating the full-fat form of dairy products, you might actually eat fewer calories throughout the day than you would otherwise," he says.

[See: [15 Best Weight-Loss Diets at a Glance.](#)]



2. A Lower Risk of Diabetes

While maintaining a healthy weight can certainly help lower your risk of developing Type 2 diabetes, research suggests that, all scales being equal, dairy fat may still improve metabolic health. After all, one 15-year study from Tufts University researchers found that, compared to people who eat the least dietary fat, people who eat the most have a [46 percent lower risk of developing Type 2 diabetes](#).

One reason: "When someone eats full-fat dairy versus low-fat dairy, the fat will actually delay the absorption of the milk's sugar," says NYC registered dietitian and certified diabetes educator Laura Cipullo, author of "Women's Health Body Clock Diet." As a result, blood sugar rises more slowly over a longer period of time. Consequently, insulin follows this same pattern. Less

circulating insulin means less risk for the development of insulin resistance and [diabetes](#)." Meanwhile, the study suggests that specific fatty acids contained in dairy, such as pentadecanoic acid and heptadecanoic acid, may play special roles in risk reduction.

3. A Happier Heart

Yes, cheese can be part of a [heart-healthy diet](#)! Research published this year in The American Journal of Clinical Nutrition found that consumption of full-fat cheese [raises healthy HDL cholesterol](#) levels, which are associated with a decreased risk of heart disease, better than does consumption of low-fat varieties.

The study builds on a 2014 review published in Current Nutrition Reports, which concluded that fat from milk, cheese and yogurt [does not contribute to the development of coronary artery disease](#). While researchers are still trying to tease out why, Cipullo notes that dairy contains more than 400 unique types of fatty acids, some of which are believed to have anti-inflammatory effects in the body.

4. A Calmer Digestive Tract

Whole milk and [yogurt](#) could also reduce belly bloat. "Full-fat dairy is lower in lactose, making it easier for individuals with lactose intolerance to digest compared to low-fat or no-fat dairy," Cipullo explains.

Meanwhile, one specific fatty acid contained in dairy, called butyric acid, is known to aid in gastrointestinal health and, according to a 2013 review from Polish researchers, may actually hold promise in the [treatment of irritable bowel syndrome](#) by supplying the bowels with cellular energy and promoting healthy gut bacteria.

[See: [The 12 Best Diets for Your Heart](#).]

5. Lower Sugar Intake

When people reduce the amount of fat they eat, they tend to increase their intake of refined carbohydrates [and sugar](#), the driving forces behind the bulk

of our nation's chronic health problems, says [Dr. Kevin Campbell](#), a board-certified internal medicine and cardiac specialist based in North Carolina. In fact, newly discovered documents published in JAMA Internal Medicine show that decades ago, the sugar industry [paid scientists to downplay the effects of sugar and put the blame on saturated fat](#) (like that in dairy).

Currently, 3 out of every 4 Americans [eat too much added sugar](#), with [90 percent of it coming from ultra-processed foods](#) – like that ice cream in your freezer. And, while we aren't promoting ice cream as a health food (everything in moderation!), it's worth noting that full-fat tubs tend to contain less sugar than do their low-fat counterparts. Why? When food manufacturers remove fat from foods (like dairy fat from ice cream), they add in extra sugar to keep you hooked, Cipullo says. Again, full-fat dairy for the win.



Greek yogurt

Thick, creamy [Greek yogurt](#) is a nutrition rock star – so if you're gobbling it down by the spoonful, good work. But why not get a little creative? Greek yogurt lightens, moistens and adds flavor, and it works as a stand-in for mayonnaise. Consider these unusual uses for our protein-packed friend:



Health benefits

Greek yogurt is tangier, creamier and less sweet than its conventional counterpart, regular yogurt. Though both types can be healthy, Greek varieties pack up to double the protein in roughly the same amount of calories, while cutting sugar in half. Because it's treated with live and active bacterial cultures, it also offers digestive health benefits. Plus, a 6-ounce serving provides nearly 20 percent of your daily calcium needs.



Substitute for mayonnaise

Greek yogurt is an ideal substitute for mayo. Mix it into your tuna or chicken salad – you'll cut down on calories and fat, while adding protein to your meal without sacrificing flavor. "Kick the flavor up a notch by adding some hot German mustard and sliced celery," says Allison Enke, a registered dietitian

and nutrition analyst for Whole Foods. You can also substitute Greek yogurt for mayo in deviled eggs.



Yogurt cheese

You'll need a strainer and double layer of cheese cloth to make this healthier alternative to cream cheese. Spoon your Greek yogurt into the cloth-lined strainer, and let it drain for at least two hours – the longer you drain it, the thicker the consistency will be. "Jazz it up by adding herbs and spices," Enke says. Once the cheese is strained, whisk it in olive oil, lemon zest, salt, pepper, chives, thyme, tarragon and basil, and let the flavors meld.



Substitute for sour cream

Add the tangy taste of sour cream to your dish – without all the extra calories and fat. "You'll get a satisfying dose of calcium and protein, too," Enke says. Use it as a topping for tacos, nachos or baked potatoes. For extra flavor,

sprinkle a few chives or reduced-fat shredded cheese over the whole dish as well.



Frozen treats

Blend vanilla or plain Greek yogurt with some fruit – or even spinach – until it’s smooth, and then pour it into ice pop molds. Freeze and enjoy, says registered dietitian Dawn Jackson Blatner, author of [“The Flexitarian Diet.”](#) Greek yogurt also works well in a blender to make smoothies and frozen drinks. Mix frozen pineapple, Greek yogurt and coconut milk, for example, for a piña colada treat.



Dessert

There are plenty of tasty options, including chocolate mousse: Stir one tablespoon of unsweetened cocoa powder into vanilla or plain Greek yogurt.

Enjoy it by itself, or use it as a chocolate fruit dip. Or go for some Greek yogurt brûlée. Add chopped fruit to a brûlée dish, Jackson Blatner says, and then top with plain yogurt, sprinkle with sugar and torch it to burn the sugar.



Yogurt ranch dressing

Mix dry ranch seasoning into plain Greek yogurt, and use it as veggie dip. You can also mix it with seasonings like garlic, dill and parsley to make a protein-packed dip for carrots, celery sticks or cucumber slices. Or add some lemon juice to thin it out, and you'll have a tasty – and healthy – salad dressing.



Pancake topper

Puree fresh fruit with maple syrup, and stir it into some Greek yogurt. Drizzle the mixture on top of your stack of pancakes – or even waffles and oatmeal,

Jackson Blatner suggests. Or put a dollop on your toasted waffles in the morning, and then drizzle some honey on for extra sweetness.



Ice cream alternative

Add a teaspoon of cow's, soy or rice milk to a single serving of Greek yogurt, Enke says, along with a few drops of vanilla extract. Stir and place it in the freezer for a high-protein ice cream that's lower in fat and sugar. "You can get creative with the flavors, too," Enke says. "Try stirring in a little cocoa powder, or fresh or frozen berries."



Marinating

Greek yogurt tenderizes meat while adding flavor, Enke says. Toss chicken with Greek yogurt and cumin for "a creamy, tangy marinade that won't dry out your dish." Or prepare Tzatziki sauce: Combine three-quarters of a cup of Greek yogurt with half a cup of grated, peeled, seedless cucumber and 1

tablespoon of lemon juice, and you'll have a "fantastic marinade, dip, spread ... you name it!"