



Dairy Through The Life Stages: New Dietary Guidelines

by Erin McGraw
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In March we celebrate National Nutrition Month, and what better time to take a closer look at the newly released 2020-2025 Dietary Guidelines for Americans (DGAs)? Every 5 years, the Department of Health and Human Services and the U.S. Department of Agriculture roll out recommendations that outline how Americans should eat. These guidelines help promote health and wellness among the US population, as well as provide guidance to federal feeding programs.

With each new version of the DGAs, dairy has maintained a place as its own food group, given the unparalleled nutrient benefits it provides. The latest edition focuses on nutrition through each life stage, and lists guidelines for children birth to 23 months, as well as for pregnant and lactating mothers. The recognition that these groups have special nutrient needs provides additional evidence that dairy fits into eating patterns across all life stages.

Being a new parent can come with worry and concern about making the best choices for your child's wellbeing, including what foods to offer and when. Before the latest release, the guidelines did not provide specific recommendations for birth-23 months of age. The addition offers guidance to parents and caregivers that is backed by science. Beginning at 6 months of age, dairy has a place at the table. "Incorporating yogurt and cheese during this critical time helps provide a variety of nutrients, flavors, and textures to support physical development and healthy eating behaviors," Erin McGraw, registered dietitian with St. Louis District Dairy Council. At this age, children eat small quantities, so make every bite count!

Starting at 1 year of age, whole milk joins cheese and yogurt as recommended foods to offer toddlers. During this time of rapid growth and development, offering concentrated sources of calories and nutrients is important. According to McGraw, "The fat in whole milk helps support brain development, while the 9 essential nutrients and calories help foster child health and growth." Childhood is critical window to develop taste preferences, establish healthy habits, and reduce the risk of nutrition-related diseases. Regularly including milk, cheese, and yogurt can help promote a lifetime of healthy habits.

Pregnancy and lactation is another life stage added to the DGAs. Increasing calories and nutrients during this time helps to support the growth and development of the infant and maintain the mother's health. Following a healthy eating pattern during pregnancy and lactation can impact the health of mother and child later in life. Two nutrients especially important during this stage are choline and iodine. McGraw says, "The dairy food group is particularly important during pregnancy and lactation because dairy contains choline and iodine to support the health of mom and baby."

No matter what stage of life you are in, dairy foods provide nutrients critical to lifelong health. The DGAs highlight 3 eating patterns: The Healthy U.S. Style, The Healthy Vegetarian, and The Healthy Mediterranean Dietary Patterns. Daily servings of dairy are included in each of these recommended patterns. As the body of research on nutrition and health grows, the evidence continues to support dairy's place in a healthy eating pattern.

To learn more about the new DGAs visit dietaryguidelines.gov. For additional information on dairy foods, visit www.stldairycouncil.org, call St. Louis District Dairy Council at (314)-835-9668, or e-mail (emcgraw@stldairycouncil.org). For easy and tasty recipes, check us out on Facebook and Instagram at STLDairyCouncil.



Chicken Tuscan Pasta Bake-from milkmeansmore.org

Making nutritious choices for you and your family doesn't have to mean hours in the kitchen. This baked pasta has a serving of dairy (hello 30% of your daily calcium needs), whole grains, and vegetables, all in one hearty, delicious dish. Not to mention, it only has 10 minutes of prep before going in the oven. You could even prepare and freeze for future use*. Be sure to add these ingredients to your shopping list this week!

Servings: 6

Prep time: 10 minutes

Bake time: 40 minutes

Ingredients

- 1 (13.25-ounce) package whole wheat penne pasta
- 1 (7-ounce) jar julienne-cut, sundried tomatoes packed in oil, drained (oil reserved) and patted dry
- 1 1/4 pounds boneless skinless chicken breasts, cut into bite-sized pieces
- 1 small onion, diced
- 1 clove garlic, minced
- 5 ounces fresh baby kale
- 3 ounces cream cheese, reduced-fat
- 1 cup milk
- 1/2 cup cheese, grated Parmesan
- 1 cup cheese, shredded Mozzarella

Directions

1. Preheat oven to 350 degrees. Grease nonstick 9x13 pan with cooking spray.
2. Bring a large pot of salted water to a boil and cook pasta to al dente according to package directions. Drain when finished cooking.
3. Meanwhile, in a large deep skillet, heat 1 tablespoon of reserved sundried tomato oil (or olive oil) and add chicken and onions. Cook until chicken is cooked through and onions are translucent, stirring occasionally, about 5 minutes. Add garlic and cook until fragrant, about 1 minute.
4. Add kale and sundried tomatoes. Cook until kale is wilted, stirring frequently. Add cream cheese, milk, and Parmesan cheese. Stir to combine and cook until cream cheese is melted and incorporated. Add pasta and stir to coat pasta with all other ingredients. Pour into prepared baking dish and top with Mozzarella cheese.
5. If baking immediately after making, place in preheated oven and cook for 30 minutes or until cheese is melted. If you like a softer noodle, cover with foil during baking.

*If freezing, cover tightly with plastic wrap and foil and place in freezer for up to 3 months. When ready to bake, remove plastic and cover with foil. Place in cold oven and turn oven to 350° F. Bake for 45 minutes covered and then uncover and continue baking for 30 minutes longer or until heated through.