

Dairy's Role In Filling The Nutrient Gap

September 5 2021 7:15 AM



ST. LOUIS - The Dietary Guidelines for Americans tell us that people do not consume enough calcium, vitamin D, potassium, and fiber. Labeling those four as “nutrients of concern” highlights the importance of getting enough of them. “The good news is that three out of the four nutrients of concern are found in dairy,” states Kelsey Bentlage, registered dietitian for St. Louis District Dairy Council. Boosting these nutrients can help decrease the risk of heart disease, cancer, and other diet-related diseases. A closer look at nutrients of concern shows why they are so critical, what foods they are in, and how much we need to stay healthy.

Calcium is the most abundant mineral in the body. “Each serving of dairy provides the body with one-third of its daily needs,” notes Bentlage. “Consuming 3 servings of dairy per day will help you hit the target for calcium.” Children and teens, whose bones are still growing, have even higher calcium needs compared to adults. Calcium is also very important for older Americans, who are at increased risk for fractures and osteoporosis. Among its many crucial functions, calcium provides building blocks for bones and helps with hormone balance, nerve signaling, blood flow maintenance, and muscle movement.

Vitamin D is produced by the body when skin is exposed to the sun. You can also get vitamin D by eating foods that naturally contain it or have been fortified with it. Working in an area with little sunlight or living in a cloudy climate far from the equator makes getting vitamin D from food a priority. “Fortunately each cup of milk contains vitamin D to ensure consumers get enough of this essential nutrient,” states Bentlage. Important functions of vitamin D include decreasing inflammation, boosting immune response, helping cells grow, and supporting strong bones.

Potassium is an essential mineral in the body. “One serving of milk, cheese, or yogurt offers nearly ¼ of the daily needs for this mineral,” notes Bentlage. Along with helping to maintain heartbeat, potassium assists in muscle contraction, promotes nerve signaling, and healthy blood pressure, and regulates pH, water, and electrolyte levels in the blood. Excessive physical activity or sweating can increase potassium needs.

Dietary fiber, a carbohydrate found in plant-based foods, is the only nutrient of concern not found in dairy foods. Fiber-rich foods can help prevent overeating and encourage portion control. This is why fiber-rich diets can be helpful in reaching a healthy weight. Fiber plays a role in maintaining gastrointestinal health, along with helping to promote satiety, or a feeling of fullness and satisfaction during mealtime.

Many Americans choose foods high in fat, sodium, and sugar instead of nutrient-rich foods that deliver calcium, vitamin D, potassium, and fiber. Choosing dairy foods every day is an easy way to address these nutrients of concern. Pairing dairy with fruits, vegetables, and whole grains is a tasty way to help close the nutrient gap.

For more information on the nutrients of concern or dairy’s health benefits, visit www.stldairycouncil.org or contact Kelsey Bentlage with St. Louis District Dairy Council: call (314) 835-9668 or e-mail kbentlage@stldairycouncil.org for delicious and nutritious recipes, check us out on Facebook and Instagram at STLDairyCouncil.

Click [here](#) for the Caprese Salad recipe.

