

April Showers Bring May Dairy Powers

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ST. LOUIS - “April showers bring May flowers,” is a phrase that dates back to the 1500s, conveying how the snow is finally gone, rain is in full force, and warmer weather is upon us. As temperatures rise and rain slows down, May brings the opportunity for new growth. While “April showers bring May flowers” refers to growth in nature, May is also a timely reminder to grow healthy minds and bodies.

The human body needs adequate calories, along with specific nutrients for optimal growth. Milk and dairy products offer 13 essential nutrients, all of which play a role in specific functions of the body. Dairy consumption typically begins around the age of 6 months, allowing babies to absorb nutrients like calcium, vitamin D, and phosphorus.

Introducing whole milk after a baby's first birthday continues the process of nutrient absorption, along with setting the foundation for building muscle, bones, and teeth. "During infancy, the brain uses over 50% of consumed calories to support its growth, making nutrient-packed whole milk the recommended choice," states Nutrition Educator Maggie Cimarolli.

During teen and early adulthood years, the calcium, vitamin D, and phosphorus in dairy help build bone density. Maximizing bone density will help reduce the risk of bone breakdown later in life. The protein found in milk and dairy is key to building and repairing muscle. Magnesium and choline support energy production and cognitive health. Additional nutrients, including vitamins A and D, zinc, and selenium, play important roles in growing a healthy immune system throughout life.

This month is not only a time for growth, but also a time for maintenance. May is Osteoporosis Awareness and Prevention month. Osteoporosis is a disease that causes the breakdown of bone, leading to serious injuries, usually occurring later in life. However, consuming milk and dairy in the early years helps create a strong foundation that is vital for a lifetime of healthy bones. The 2020-2025 Dietary Guidelines for Americans recommend dairy consumption every day to meet the body's building and maintenance needs in the following amounts: Infants 1 $\frac{2}{3}$ – 2 servings, children ages 2 to 8 years old 2 – 2 $\frac{1}{2}$ servings, and children ages 9 years old through adulthood 3 servings.

The versatility of dairy makes it easy to work the recommended servings into springtime schedules. While the school year is winding down, outdoor sports are starting up and offer the perfect reason to refuel with ice-cold chocolate milk. Snack options like colorful berry parfaits and creamy cheese and crackers are an easy addition to any spring activity. Barbecues and family gatherings allow for crunchy veggie and yogurt-based dip trays; fresh tomato, cucumber, and feta cheese salads; and sweet and tangy fruit pizzas with cream cheese frosting. "One of my favorite things about dairy is that it can be personalized. With so many options in the dairy case, everyone can find something they enjoy. With the warm weather upon us, there are even more ways to work dairy into our diets," says Cimarolli.



Sweet and Tangy Fruit Pizza

Add a lot of color to your plate this spring! This sweet and tangy pizza with a creamy base is a delicious treat on a sunny day.

Prep Time: 1 hour and 10 minutes

Yield: 1 pizza; 10 – 12 servings

Crust:

Pre-made Sugar Cookie Dough

Cream Cheese Frosting:

8 oz. cream cheese, softened to room temperature

¼ cup butter, softened to room temperature

2 cups powdered sugar

2 Tbsp. milk

1 tsp. pure vanilla extract

Toppings:

8 strawberries, sliced

5 kiwis, sliced

1 mango, sliced

1 pineapple, diced

½ cup blueberries

1 bunch of grapes, halved

Directions:

Preheat the oven to 350°F. Grease a 12-inch pizza pan. Remove chilled cookie dough from the refrigerator and press onto the pizza pan in an even, flat circle. Bake per the directions on the package (about 15 – 20 minutes) or until the edges are very lightly browned. Allow the crust to cool completely before decorating.

While crust is cooling, wash, dry, and cut up fruit. Set aside for decorating.

Cream cheese frosting: In a medium bowl or with a mixer, mix the cream cheese and butter together until smooth, about 2 minutes. Add the powdered sugar and 1 Tbsp. of milk. Mix for 2 minutes. Add vanilla and 1 more Tbsp. of milk (if needed) to thin out the frosting. Mix for 1 minute. Spread the frosting in a thick layer over the sugar cookie crust.

Decorate with fruit.

Cut pizza into slices and serve. Leftovers will keep in the refrigerator for up to 3 days.

Additional Tips:

If you have a favorite recipe, try making your own homemade sugar cookie dough!

Add even more tang to your pizza with a fruit glaze! Mix fruit, water, cornstarch, and sugar for a homemade glaze or use your favorite fruit preserves. You can thin the fruit preserves by mixing in a little bit of water.

Make it your own by adding some of your favorite fruits!

For more information on the power of dairy in bone health, visit St. Louis Dairy Council at www.STLDairyCouncil.org, call (314) 835-9668, or email mcimarolli@STLDairyCouncil.org. For dairy-packed recipes, visit St. Louis Dairy Council on Facebook and Instagram at [STLDairyCouncil](#).