

Calcium-Rich Dairy Foods Are Positives For Oral Health

by Maggie Cimarolli

January 27 2024 7:35 AM



ST. LOUIS - February is National Children's Dental Health Month — a time to recognize the importance of prioritizing oral health at an early age. St. Louis District Dairy Council annually celebrates this month with school nurses and dental health professionals by providing resources that highlight the beneficial role of calcium-rich dairy foods in oral health. This February, the organization is distributing 500 dental health posters and 4,000 toothbrushes to school nurses in eastern Missouri and southern and central Illinois.

Cheese takes the spotlight when it comes to oral health. This dairy food is a great source of calcium and phosphorus, both of which strengthen teeth. The protein in cheese builds up the enamel in teeth, helping prevent cavities. Cheese is also a great way to finish a meal or snack. The act of chewing cheese stimulates saliva production, which helps clean teeth.

Because the main ingredient of cheese is milk, cheese is packed full of the same nutrients that milk has to offer, including many vitamins and minerals. “Cheese is the No. 2 source of calcium in the diet, coming second only to milk,” said Maggie Cimarolli, a registered dietitian with St. Louis District Dairy Council. “Because of this, cheese helps keep bones and teeth strong. Cheese also provides high-quality protein, the nutrient that provides energy, and helps build and repair muscles.”

Another unique quality of cheese is that it is low in lactose, allowing many individuals who are lactose-intolerant to enjoy this dairy food. Lactose is the sugar naturally found in milk and dairy foods. During the cheese-making process, the whey (the liquid where the lactose is stored) is removed from the cheese. The removal of the whey results in the removal of the majority of the lactose. This allows those with lactose-intolerance to enjoy a great source of calcium and protein, without the addition of digestive discomfort.

Celebrate with cheese!

Created over 8,000 years ago, cheese made its way to the United States in the early 17th century. More than 2,000 different kinds of cheese exist across the world, 300 of which are available in the United States. Today, cheese is categorized into eight varieties, including pasta filata, fresh soft, semi-soft, semi-hard, hard, soft-ripened, blue-veined and processed. With so many different varieties, textures and flavor profiles, cheese pairs well with almost every food, and has become a staple in many American households. According to the USDA, Americans consumed approximately 42 pounds of cheese per person in 2022.



It's important to note that cheese can be enjoyed not only during the month of February, but year-round. Whether enjoying a charcuterie board at a family gathering, cheese on top of a sandwich or salad at lunch, or refueling at the end of a sports game, the nutrient profile of cheese offers benefits for everyone.

"Individuals should be striving to get three servings of dairy every single day," Cimarolli said. "By adding 1 ½ ounces of cheese to a meal or snack throughout the day, an individual is consuming a serving of dairy, allowing them to get closer to that goal."

For more information on the benefits of cheese, visit www.stldairycouncil.org or contact Maggie Cimarolli at 314-835-9668 [orMCimarolli@STLDairyCouncil.org](mailto:MCimarolli@STLDairyCouncil.org). Follow St. Louis District Dairy Council on Facebook and Instagram at STLDairyCouncil.

The St. Louis District Dairy Council (SLDDC) is a nonprofit nutrition education organization funded by local dairy farmers. Since 1932, SLDDC has served 131 counties in central/southern Illinois and eastern Missouri as the go-to educational resource and advocate for the role of dairy foods as part of a healthful diet. As The Nutrition Education People, we are proud to spread knowledge to local communities, bridging the gap between local dairy farmers and consumers. The staff is comprised of

professionals with experience in nutrition, food service management, education and communication, and we take pride in delivering engaging programs throughout the communities we serve.