



Flavored Milk FAQ's

Flavored Milk: It's More Flavor!

Flavored milk is packed with nutrients that make it nutritionally superior to soft drinks and fruit drinks. Below are the answers to frequently asked questions about flavored milk, that can increase your knowledge on why flavored milk is a nutritious choice, and provide you with information to give to the administration, parents, teachers and students.

What is flavored milk?

Flavored milk is simply plain cow's milk, with a little added flavoring and sweetener. It's available in numerous flavors, including chocolate, strawberry, banana and root beer, from whole to fat-free varieties.

How nutritious is flavored milk?

Flavored milk is a nutrient-rich package providing the same nine essential nutrients as plain milk including, calcium, potassium, phosphorus, protein, vitamin D, vitamin A, vitamin B12, riboflavin and niacin (niacin equivalents). Milk's nutrients, especially calcium, are necessary for developing strong bones and teeth. And, milk provides three of the five nutrients that fall short in children's diets, as identified in the 2005 Dietary Guidelines for Americans, including calcium, potassium and magnesium.¹ Each 8-ounce serving of milk — plain or flavored — provides 300 mg of calcium, about one-third to one-fourth of the daily calcium requirement for children.

Why choose flavored milk?

Compared to their peers, children who drink flavored milk drink more milk overall and are more likely to meet their calcium needs without consuming more total fat and calories, according to a study in the Journal of American Dietetic Association.² A nutritious alternative to other beverages, flavored milks are often acceptable to children who might not drink milk plain.

How does flavored milk fit into school nutrition programs?

The importance of providing children milk they like, and therefore will drink, was highlighted by the 2002 School Milk Pilot Test, which demonstrated that with simple product improvements – including additional flavors and plastic packaging – milk sales

increased 18% overall at both the elementary and secondary level and milk consumption increased up to 37%.³

Furthermore, a 2004 report on soft drinks in schools from the American Academy of Pediatrics recommends replacing sweetened drinks with real fruit and vegetable juices, water and low-fat white or flavored milk. The report also notes that as sweetened drink consumption rises, milk consumption declines and milk is the primary source of calcium in the diets of children and adolescents.⁴ Children are more likely to drink flavored milk on a regular basis at school than at home.^{5,6} Offering a variety of flavored milks helps ensure children have access to nutritious beverages.

Does flavored milk contain as much added sugar as fruit drinks or carbonated soft drinks?

No. While flavored milk contains both natural and added sugars (nearly half of the sugar in flavored milk is naturally present in the milk), it doesn't have nearly as much as other beverages that kids are drinking such as carbonated soft drinks. On average, an eight-ounce low-fat flavored milk has around 4 teaspoons of added sugar while a can of soda has about 9 teaspoons and fruit punch about 6 teaspoons. Researchers analyzed food consumption data from the Nutrition Health and Nutrition Examination Survey (NHANES) and found that chocolate milk and other flavored milks contributed only 2 percent of total added sugar in a teen's diet, compared to 50 percent or more added by soft drinks and fruit drinks.⁷

What about the recommendation to decrease added sugars from the Alliance for a Healthier Generation's School Beverage Guidelines?

The Alliance for a Healthier Generation is a joint initiative of the American Heart Association and the William J. Clinton Foundation that established voluntary guidelines, in conjunction with soft drink companies. The guidelines recommend schools remove high-calorie soft drinks from all schools and limit beverage portion sizes and calories available to children during the school day. Under these guidelines, only lower calorie or nutritious beverages will be sold to schools, including regular and flavored milk. These are nutrition guidelines to assist schools that choose to follow them in improving the nutritional value of foods sold – they are not mandatory guidelines.

These guidelines were recently amended to extend the calorie cap deadline on flavored milk from the initial level of 150 to 180 calories per eight ounces until August, 2008. Visit www.healthiergeneration.org for complete guidelines.

Doesn't the Institute of Medicine (IOM) recommend less added sugar in schools?

The 2007 National Academy of Sciences' Institute of Medicine report, "*Nutrition Standards for Foods in Schools: Leading the Way Toward Healthier Youth*" recommends nutrition standards be established for foods and beverages sold outside of the School Meal Program, such as a la carte cafeteria, vending machine and school store items.⁸ It is important to note that these are recommendations, not binding policy.

For flavored milk, the report recommended an upper limit of 22 grams of sugar. Unfortunately, the sugar levels in flavored milk that were recommended do not reflect the majority of low-fat flavored milk offered in schools. It is important to consider the overall nutrient package that flavored milk offers and the evolving research that supports flavored milk's role in improving the occurrence that a food group such as the milk group will be consumed by children during the bone building years. National Dairy Council® (NDC) agrees that products containing lower sugar should be developed and made available to children however, 22g may be too low.

When selecting a low-fat flavored milk, compare grams of added sugar per serving and select the option with the lowest amount of sugar that a child will still find palatable.

Won't the added calories from sugar contribute to weight gain?

No, according to an abstract, consumption of flavored milk or plain milk is associated with positive nutrient intakes by children and adolescents. In this study, intake of added sugars among children and adolescents did not differ between flavored milk drinkers and milk non-drinkers, and body weights and body mass indexes (BMIs) of milk drinkers were comparable to or lower than measures of milk non-drinkers. Furthermore, the kids who included flavored milk in their diets reported higher milk intakes than those who only drank plain milk.⁹

The 2005 Dietary Guidelines for Americans recognize that small amounts of sugar added to nutrient dense foods, such as reduced-fat milk products, may increase a person's intake of such foods by enhancing palatability of these products, thus improving nutrient intake without contributing excessive calories.¹

What about the use of sugar substitutes instead of sugar in flavored milk?

NDC supports the development of flavored milk formulations that contain reduced levels of added sugar that will still appeal to children. However, rather than using sugar substitutes, sugar is considered as the first sweetener option for these flavored milk innovations.

Although extensive testing by the FDA has shown five sugar substitutes (saccharine, aspartame, acesulfame-k, neotame, and sucralose [Splenda®]) to be safe for adults and children, our research indicates that sugar substitutes have limited acceptability among moms and healthy professionals. In addition, the 2007 IOM report, *Nutrition Standards for Foods in Schools*, recommends that beverages containing sugar substitutes not be allowed in elementary or middle schools, and be allowed in high schools only after the end of the school day.

How about the use of high fructose corn syrup in flavored milk?

As with most everything we eat, people can enjoy sweeteners, including high fructose corn syrup (HFCS), when consumed in moderation. When it comes to flavored milk, the American Academy of Pediatrics, American Dietetic Association and the 2005 Dietary Guidelines for Americans Committee agree that the added sugar in flavored milk does not negate milk's many health benefits. Specifically in regard to HFCS, there is very

little different between sucrose, which is granulated sugar, and HFCS. Once absorbed, they are indistinguishable to the human body. For more information refer to the following documents: International Food Information Council "Food Insights" article, www.ific.org/foodinsight/2004/ja/fructosefi404.cfm; "Fact sheet from the American Dietetic Association, www.eatright.org/ada/files/Hot.pdf

Do the sweeteners in milk cause hyperactivity?

No. Flavored milks contain less table sugar per 8-ounce serving than cola drinks. According to scientific research, sugar does not cause hyperactivity or mood swings in children.

Do the sweeteners in milk cause tooth decay?

No. Because flavored milk is a beverage, it is less likely to cause cavities than sticky foods. The American Academy of Pediatric Dentistry agrees that chocolate milk is a healthy beverage and, in fact, the calcium, phosphorus and cocoa in chocolate milk actually may protect teeth from decay.

Does chocolate in milk affect calcium absorption?

No. Chocolate milk contains a small amount of oxalic acid, a compound found in cocoa beans and other plants. The very small amount of this compound in chocolate milk has no significant affect on the availability of milk's calcium.

How much caffeine is in chocolate milk?

Each cup of chocolate milk has about 2 to 7 mg of caffeine, the same amount that's found in one cup of decaffeinated coffee. This tiny amount of caffeine in chocolate milk is too small to affect most children. Colas, on the other hand, may contain up to 10 times more caffeine than chocolate milk.

Do children and young adults choose flavored milk?

Yes. Flavored milk is a favorite with kids because it tastes great and is "kid cool." When offered at school, chocolate milk is the most popular choice of milk. A study showed that milk consumption increased at school when chocolate milk was offered.

Can you drink chocolate milk if you are lactose intolerant?

Chocolate milk may be more easily digested than unflavored milk in people with lactose intolerance. In fact, most individuals with a limited ability to break down lactose can drink two cups of any type of milk a day when consumed in small servings or with other foods.

References:

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