

Fact Sheet

SAFEGUARDING THE HEALTH
OF AMERICA'S CHILDREN:

The Importance of Dairy Foods in Child Nutrition Programs

Top 3 Reasons Cheese Is Important in Child Nutrition Programs

The Dietary Guidelines, numerous health organizations and the latest science support the continued role of cheese as a core component of child nutrition programs as well as the Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants and Children (WIC) and the Child and Adult Care Food Program (CACFP).

Cheese is a nutritious food that nourishes growing children

- As a good source of high quality, easily digestible protein,¹ cheese is considered a meat/meat alternative by National School Lunch Program, and can be served as an ounce-for-ounce substitute for meat.² Cheese can also, in some cases, be substituted for fluid milk in the WIC programs.³
- Some types of cheese are excellent sources of calcium, delivering 27% of the mineral in the US food supply.⁴ One and a half ounces of some natural cheese contains approximately 300 mg of calcium, the equivalent of 1 cup of milk.

Cheese is part of a healthy eating pattern

- As a result of a restrictive approach in some localities, some foods that provide important nutrients, like cheese, are at risk of being unintentionally eliminated, because of the saturated fat and sodium content. However, as illustrated by the USDA's *MyPyramid for Kids*, the long-term health of children and adolescents can best be achieved by moderate consumption of a variety of nutrient-rich foods among and within the major food groups, including low-fat and fat-free dairy foods.
- Results from two studies of middle school children indicated that the addition of cheese to various menu offerings may help increase the consumption of some Food Groups to Encourage - fruit, vegetables, and whole grains - compared to when cheese was not offered.⁵

Cheese is considered a healthy snack food for school children

- The School Nutrition Association has developed nutrition recommendations for foods sold outside reimbursable meals and allows up to 1 ounce of cheese per serving.⁶ Because it provides important nutrients, cheese is exempt from fat and saturated fat standards and it is considered a "tier 1" (more healthful) food.
- The Alliance for a Healthier Generation (AHG)⁷ also has developed a voluntary set of recommendations for competitive foods in schools, and has included reduced-fat and part-skim cheese, nuts, nut butters and seeds as part of their Healthy Schools Program. The AHG also exempts reduced-fat and part-skim cheese from saturated fat and sodium limits (as required for other snack foods), so schools can offer up to 1.5-ounce servings of cheese as a qualified snack food.
- Cheese may help prevent the formation of dental caries⁸ and is recommended as a healthful snack by the American Academy of Pediatric Dentistry.⁹

References

- 1 Miller GD, Jarvis JK, McBean LD. *Handbook of Dairy Foods and Nutrition*, 3rd ed. CRC Press. 2007, Boca Raton, FL.
- 2 USDA National School Lunch Program. <http://www.fns.usda.gov/cnd/Governance/regulations/7CFR210.pdf> (Accessed November 14, 2008).
- 3 Committee to Review the WIC Food Packages; Food and Nutrition Board, Institute of Medicine. *WIC Food Packages: Time for a Change*. The National Academies Press, Washington D.C., 2006.
- 4 <http://www.ers.usda.gov/Briefing/DietQuality/Availability.htm> (Accessed January 2, 2009).
- 5 Donnelly J, et al. The Effects of Visible Cheese on Selection and Consumption of Food Groups to Encourage in Middle School Children. Presented at School Nutrition Association annual meeting, June 2009.
- 6 School Nutrition Association. *National Nutrition Standards Recommendations*, December 8, 2008.
- 7 Alliance for a Healthier Generation Healthy School Program: Competitive Foods Guidelines. 2006. http://www.healthiergeneration.org/schools.aspx?id=76&ekmensel=1ef02451_10_114_btnlink (Accessed November 17, 2008)
- 8 Kashket S, DePaola DP. Cheese consumption and the development and progression of dental caries. *Nutr Rev* 2002;60(4):97-103.
- 9 American Academy of Pediatric Dentistry. Diet and Dental Health. *AAPD Fast Facts* 1999-2000.

