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OCTOBER 2010

# Which Yogurt Should You Go For?

We looked under the lids of some of the most popular kinds out there to see what's healthy—and what's not.

By Leslie Barrie

**AS FAR AS GOOD-FOR-YOU FOODS GO, YOGURT COULDN'T BE A MORE** stand-out citizen. But with so many varieties popping up in the dairy aisle—Greek? Goat's milk? Kefir?—it's hard to keep them all straight. Here are the perks and drawbacks of each type, so you'll know which ones are right for you.

**tart treat**  
Pick plainer varieties of yogurt over sugary dessert-like flavors. And don't fear a little fat—low-fat yogurt may keep you fuller than nonfat and often has fewer added sweeteners.



## Traditional milk

**THE SCOOP:** The yogurt most of us grew up on is made by fermenting cow's milk with live bacteria.

**THE PERKS:** It's a solid source of protein, calcium, potassium, and B vitamins.

**THE DRAWBACKS:** Beware of dessert-like flavors packing added sugars, including high-fructose corn syrup. Even fruit-on-the-bottom varieties may contain more sugar than fruit by weight, says Alyse Levine, RD, founder of NutritionBite, a consulting firm in Los Angeles. Stick to plain, low-fat yogurt (with 12 grams or less of sugar and 3 grams or less of saturated fat), and add fresh fruit for sweetness.

**TOP PICKS:** Stonyfield Farm, Horizon Organic, Brown Cow

## Greek

**THE SCOOP:** This cow's-milk variety is specially strained, resulting in its thick, creamy texture. (Icelandic-style yogurt is made with a similar straining method.)

**THE PERKS:** Greek yogurt has less sugar than traditional yogurt, and up to double the protein, making it more filling.

**THE DRAWBACKS:** It also has less calcium—about a third to a half less than in the regular cow's-milk type. Some brands add thickeners like gelatin, but authentically strained Greek yogurt doesn't need additives, says Kate Geagan, MS, RD, author of *Go Green, Get Lean*.

**TOP PICKS:** Fage, Oikos, Chobani

## Goat's milk

**THE SCOOP:** Made using the same fermentation process as cow's-milk yogurt, it yields a

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## nutrition scoop

similar nutritional and textural profile.

**THE PERKS:** This may be a good option for those sensitive to cow's milk because it lacks proteins found there that can cause allergic reactions and is slightly lower in lactose, Levine says.

**THE DRAWBACKS:** It has a slightly gamey flavor.

**TOP PICKS:** Redwood Hill Farm, Liberte

### Nondairy

**THE SCOOP:** Made with soy milk, this type resembles cow's-milk yogurt nutritionally speaking, though it can contain slightly less protein.

**THE PERKS:** Ideal for vegans and people who are lactose-intolerant or allergic to cow's milk. Plus, it's naturally cholesterol-free. (Low-fat and full-fat cow's-milk yogurts have up to 10 percent of your daily value of cholesterol; the nonfat cow's-milk type has zero.)

**THE DRAWBACKS:** Soy milk is made through a grinding and heating process, says Marissa Lippert, RD, author of *The Cheater's Diet*; some of the bean's nutrients (like fiber) are lost that way. Sometimes sugars are added, too, for flavoring. The yogurt can also have a gritty texture. Avoid soy yogurt if your doctor has recommended that you steer clear of soy in general (say, if you have a history of breast cancer).

**TOP PICKS:** Whole Soy & Co, Turtle Mountain So Delicious Dairy Free, Stonyfield Farm O'Soy



### fill'er up!

Yogurt always leave you wanting something more? Add 1/4 cup low-fat granola to help you stay satisfied longer. Other filling add-ins to try: sliced almonds, oranges, even hummus (for a savory snack).

### Kefir

**THE SCOOP:** This yogurt-like, fermented beverage is made from a culturing process that combines milk with kefir grains (a mixture of bacteria and yeast).

**THE PERKS:** Kefir is loaded with probiotics—sometimes even more so than its cousin, yogurt. Because it's naturally thinner than yogurt, it may be easier to digest.

**THE DRAWBACKS:** The acidic flavor can take some getting used to, so most nutritionists suggest starting out with small doses to avoid an upset stomach. If you buy it in smoothie form, watch out for added sugar.

**TOP PICKS:** Nancy's Organic, Lifeway

## WHAT'S THE DEAL WITH PROBIOTICS?

The "good" bacteria, or probiotics, in yogurt have been touted as the answer to health conditions from digestive distress to immune issues. But do they really work? Here's what we know: All yogurt naturally contains two strains of these microorganisms—*Lactobacillus bulgaricus* and *Streptococcus thermophilus*—as a result of the culturing process. Research suggests that regularly consuming these and other probiotic strains found in yogurt may help with diarrhea, urinary tract infections, and irritable bowel syndrome. But whether probiotics are truly a cure-all has yet to be confirmed. Scientists are still studying which strains are most effective, especially when added to food; most of the benefits have been seen in subjects who got probiotics in supplement form. While the jury's still out, there's no harm in trying to get the benefits of probiotics by eating yogurt—just make sure yours contains live bacteria (they may die or be removed as the yogurt is processed). Look for the "Live and Active Cultures" seal, which manufacturers can choose to put on containers that contain at least 100 million cultures per gram, the minimum dose thought to be effective.