

Fermented Foods: Yogurt¹

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Yogurt is produced when heated milk is added to live bacteria cultures, specifically *Lactobacillus bulgaricus* and *Streptococcus thermophilus*. Milk is converted to yogurt by undergoing fermentation, where the milk sugar (lactose) is converted into glucose and galactose (simple sugars). These simple sugars are converted into lactic acid, giving yogurt its acidity, specific texture, and flavor. Depending on how the yogurt is made and which ingredients are added, there are many varieties of yogurt to choose from. This publication describes these types of yogurts and provides evidence of their health benefits.

What are the different types of yogurts?

Yogurt can be modified before or after the fermentation process. The type of milk used (skimmed, semi-skimmed, whole, plant-based) will determine the flavor and final fat content of the yogurt. A *Skyr Icelandic yogurt* is mildly tangy in flavor and has the thickest consistency (“The Different Types of Yogurt” 2021). For *drinkable yogurt*, there are various options and flavors, with textures ranging from a thin consistency like skim milk to a thicker consistency like traditional yogurt. Making *Greek yogurt* involves straining regular yogurt to give it a thicker texture and higher protein content. Adding lactase enzyme to regular yogurt breaks down the lactose, resulting in *lactose-free yogurt* that tastes like traditional yogurt (“The Different Types of Yogurt” 2021).

What are the potential health benefits of yogurt?

Yogurt is a source of protein, providing essential amino acids. In general, 1 cup of yogurt provides 9 grams of protein. Yogurt also contains a wide range of fatty acids and is a good source of calcium, potassium, and magnesium (Tutunchi et al. 2023). Research suggests that consuming yogurt has many benefits in improving overall health, such as decreasing the likelihood of breast and colorectal cancer and Type 2 diabetes, maintaining a healthy weight, reducing cardiovascular risk, enhancing bone health, and promoting good gut health (Tutunchi 2023).

One possible explanation for the positive effects of regular yogurt consumption is the provision of beneficial bacteria in yogurt and their effects on the gut microbiome. The ingredients contribute to a diverse range of good bacteria in the gut, thus improving immune system functions (Savaiano and Hutkins 2021).

Regular consumption of fermented yogurt products has been shown to lower levels of total cholesterol and LDL cholesterol (aka the bad cholesterol). In addition, these fermented dairy products serve as dietary sources of vitamin D and vitamin K, which are important for bone health and insulin sensitivity (Tutunchi 2023).

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Is yogurt an appropriate fermented food choice for everyone?

Despite having many beneficial effects, not everyone should consume yogurt. People who have a milk allergy or follow a vegan lifestyle should avoid the consumption of yogurt; however, many plant-based alternatives are available. There is always a level of risk with making and consuming fermented foods. Biological hazards such as bacteria, viruses, and parasites are the main causes of foodborne illnesses (Skowron et al. 2022; Nielson-Stowell, n.d.).

Summary

Yogurt is a dairy product produced by the fermentation of live bacteria. Fermenting yogurt involves a series of steps to transform milk into a creamy, tangy, and nutritious product through the action of beneficial bacteria. It can be enjoyed plain or with added flavors and toppings. Fermenting yogurt not only creates a delicious dairy product but also provides a multitude of health benefits and decreases the risk of developing certain health diseases.

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