FOOD

Yoghurt is a popular source of dairy which provides the body with calcium, protein, vitamins and other nutrients and minerals. It is made by adding bacterial cultures to milk, which causes the milk’s sugar, lactose, to turn into lactic acid. Bacterial cultures such as acidophilus promote the growth of healthy bacteria in the colon. People who are lactose-intolerant can sometimes tolerate yoghurt because the live yoghurt culture contains enzymes that help to break down lactose in the intestines. However, professional guidance should always be sought from a doctor or nutritionist if an allergy or intolerance is suspected.

Increased yoghurt consumption might help increase one's resistance to immune-related diseases such as cancer and infection, particularly gastrointestinal infection, according to a 2004 review published in the American Journal of Clinical Nutrition. However it is important to note that these specific health benefits depend on the strain and viability of the culture in yoghurt (see ‘Beneficial Bacteria’, Consumer Choice, April 2008 p132). This is why it is important to choose a good quality yoghurt that contains live cultures.

Dairy products including yoghurt are a valuable source of protein, vitamins and minerals, in particular calcium. Calcium builds bone and teeth and keeps them strong, and is also vital for nerve transmission, blood clotting and muscle functions. The recommended daily intake of calcium per day for an adult female is 800mg, while girls aged 11 to 18 should aim for 1200mg, as should pregnant and breastfeeding women. A 2008 survey by Safefood (see Useful contacts) found that 23% of Irish women are not currently meeting the recommended daily intake of calcium and 42% of teenage girls have an inadequate intake. The National Dairy Council recommends a 3-a-Day eating plan for dairy products for adults or five servings for teenagers or women who are pregnant or breastfeeding. A serving amounts to 1oz or 28g of hard cheese (about the size of a matchbox), 1/3 pint of milk or one small carton of yoghurt. Low fat yoghurt is a wise option if you want to reduce your saturated fat intake but is not suitable for children.

Tips for choosing yoghurt

- Check the nutritional label because the nutritional value of yoghurt can differ greatly between brands; the higher the protein and the lower the sugar content, the more actual yoghurt you will be getting.
- Avoid yoghurts with artificial colours, flavourings or sweeteners.
- Check labels for ‘live’ and ‘active’ cultures in order to get the maximum nutritional value because heat treatment often kills many of the health benefits of yoghurt.
- Mix plain/natural low-fat live yoghurt with fresh fruit such as strawberries for a change instead of buying strawberry flavoured yoghurt. You can get the full array of nutrients without the added sugar, sweeteners, stabilisers and fillers that so many yoghurt brands contain.

Even if you add a little honey for sweetness you will still come out ahead in terms of sugar content when compared with many brands that add large amounts of sugar and sweeteners to their products.

Yoghurt

Not all yoghurts are created equally when it comes to their nutritional content. We look at low fat strawberry yoghurts.

AT A GLANCE

Taste test.
Tips.
Our verdict.
taste test: strawberry yoghurt

AVERAGE NUTRITIONAL VALUE PER 100G

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Brand</th>
<th>M&amp;S Organic Low Fat Strawberry Probiotic</th>
<th>Glenisk Organic Low Fat Strawberry</th>
<th>Brooklea Low Fat Bio Strawberry with Wholegrains</th>
<th>Old Mac Donnell’s Farm Live Low Fat</th>
<th>Tesco Value Low Fat Strawberry</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Rating out of 5</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
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<tr>
<td>Price per 100g (£)</td>
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<td>Protein (g)</td>
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<td>5.7</td>
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<tr>
<td>Carbohydrate (g)</td>
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<td>13.1</td>
<td>8.6</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>14.9</td>
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<tr>
<td>Of which sugars (g)</td>
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<td>12.8</td>
<td>6.9</td>
<td>5.5</td>
<td>14.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fat (g)</td>
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<td>1.6</td>
<td>1.5</td>
<td>2.5</td>
<td>0.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Of which saturates (g)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Sodium (g)</td>
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<td>0.06</td>
<td>0.1</td>
<td>-</td>
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</table>

We chose five low fat strawberry yoghurts and compared them for nutritional value, ingredients, price, taste and consistency:

M&S Organic Low Fat Strawberry Probiotic 170g: Score 4/5
When opened, this product seems to contain more evidence of strawberries than the other yoghurts. According to the ingredients list, it contains 10% strawberries. Our tasters said it had a good texture and was neither too sweet nor too sour. The sugar content is 13.5g per 100g – anything over 10g per 100g is high. However there are no artificial sweeteners or flavourings used in the production of this product and it contained added probiotic cultures. It was the most popular of the yoghurts tested, scoring ahead of the Glenisk and Brooklea products with an average 4 out of 5 marks.

Glenisk Lowfat Organic Probiotic Strawberry Yoghurt 125: Score 3/5
The Glenisk low fat organic yoghurt with pro-biotic cultures looks and smells as expected, pale pink in colour with very small pieces of strawberry through it. The percentage of strawberries is just 10%. However it is thick, smooth and tasty with just a hint of sharpness. According to our tasters this yoghurt is not too sweet despite the added cane sugar.

Brooklea Low Fat Bio Strawberry with Wholegrains Aldi 250g: Score 3/5
Our tasters said this yoghurt was tasty but very sweet. Some liked the addition of the grains while others found the little bits off-putting. Although it is low in fat, the presence of fructose, flavourings and artificial sweeteners mean that there are far more added ingredients present in Aldi’s Brooklea yoghurt than some of the other yoghurts we tested. Additives such as modified starch, guar gum and xantham gum are used to make the yoghurt taste creamier. It also contains aspartame, a source of phenylalanine which is an amino acid found naturally in all high protein foods. Aspartame is a sweetener that is used instead of sugar to keep the calorie content of products low. Sufferers of Phenylketonuria (PKU) need this information to avoid the ingredient. In addition, it is not suitable for coeliacs as it contains wheat, rye, barley and oats. Calcium and yoghurt nutrition can be obtained from other brands of yoghurt without the added flavourings, colours and sweeteners.

Old Mac Donnell’s Farm Live Strawberry Yoghurt 250g: Score 2.5/5
On opening the carton it was clear that the product had separated and all of our tasters said this yoghurt looked less than appealing. The strawberry fruit was at the bottom and there was a watery presence at the top that could have been whey. However the fruit can be easily stirred back in. There are no artificial additives in this product. It contains the highest amount of protein at 5.9g per 100g and is the lowest in sugars which are also 5.5g per 100g. It has the benefit of the added live pro-biotic cultures lactobacillus bulgaricus, streptococcus thermophilus, bifido bacterium longum and lactobacillus acidophilus. However, our tasters found it bitter although they felt that there was a more natural fruit taste from this product than from any of the others.

Tesco Value Low Fat Strawberry Yoghurt 125g: Score 2/5
The Tesco Value yoghurt has a watery consistency, which is unsurprising as water is the first ingredient listed. It tasted quite artificial and the terms ‘gloopy’, ‘nasty’ and ‘chemical’ were used by our testers to describe it. It was also the least nutritious product in terms of the values offered. It was the sweetest product we tested. It is the highest in sugars with 14.9g per 100g but the lowest in protein at 2.8g per 100g. There was a terrible aftertaste from this yoghurt and too many added ingredients. We were unsure whether it contained any real strawberries. On the label it simply states ‘strawberry and strawberry juice from concentrate 3.5%’. It scored 2 out of 5 – the least popular product we tested.

our verdict
As our test revealed, it can often be a case of less fruit and more flavourings and sugar when it comes to buying certain brands of yoghurt. In general, the longer the list of ingredients and fillers the more calories you get and the less yoghurt nutrition. Always check the sugar content and be aware that low fat may mean high sugar – that is anything with more than 10g of sugars per 100g. Yoghurt already has natural sugar in the form of lactose and added sugar can ruin its goodness. We also found that the use of artificial sweeteners is common but it is better to limit your intake of these. It is disappointing to find some manufacturers can get away with using cheap ingredients and little or no fruit. Consumers who shop around however will find that there are better quality and healthier products to be found.