



# Why milk matters



Oklahoma Cooperative  
Extension Service

*Deana Hildebrand, PhD., RD,LD, Associate Professor & Extension Specialist*  
*Christine Walters, RDN, LD, MS, Extension Program Assistant*  
Oklahoma Cooperative Extension Service  
Nutritional Sciences Department, Oklahoma State University

**M**ilk is full of calcium and other nutrients needed to grow strong bones. When you don't drink enough milk or eat foods made from milk, your bones get soft and brittle. Every time you drink milk, your bones get what they need to become and stay strong. Your body builds nearly half of its' bones between the ages of 11 and 19 years! Be sure children get enough milk while they are young to help their bodies grow strong bones. As a parent, don't stop drinking milk because you have stopped growing. It is important for parents to drink milk and eat calcium-rich foods to help bones stay strong and healthy.

### What kind of milk and how much?

Babies should drink breast milk or iron-fortified formula until their first birthday. Children 1 to 2 years of age need whole milk. Their stomachs are small, and they need the fat in whole milk to grow properly.

After their 2<sup>nd</sup> birthday, children can drink low-fat milk. It is a good habit for your whole family to drink low-fat milk.

Children 1 to 3 years of age, should have two servings of dairy foods each day. Serve milk in small amounts – about ¼ cup at a time. Remember that yogurt and cheese also count as servings of milk.

**Remember,  
for life long  
healthy bones,  
milk matters!**

### Easy ways to get more calcium

- Eat yogurt for a snack.
- Drink milk instead of soda or juice at meals.
- Choose orange juice with added calcium.
- Put cheese on your sandwich or pack a cheese stick with lunch.
- Eat dark leafy green vegetables such as spinach, kale and collard greens.

### Lactose intolerance

Lactose intolerance is a food sensitivity, not a milk allergy or sickness. It is not common during childhood. Even if you are lactose intolerant, your child probably is not.

Diarrhea, stomachache, gas or feeling bloated are symptoms of lactose intolerance. These same symptoms can point to a more serious health problem.

Talking with your child's health care provider is the only way to know what the symptoms really mean. Skip the urge to diagnose lactose intolerance yourself. If you stop serving milk, your child will miss nutrients needed to grow and stay healthy.

### If your child's health care provider diagnoses your child with lactose intolerance

Your child can still enjoy milk products and get the nutrition that milk provides. If your child goes to a day care, give them a note from your child's health care provider requesting lactose-free milk and milk products.

Together, plan ways to fit calcium-rich foods into the snacks and meals your child eats. Here are some ideas to use at home and share with your day care provider to help your child get enough dairy foods without the symptoms.

- **Reduce it.** Consider buying and serving lactose-free milk to yourself and children.

- **Sip it.** Serve milk and dairy foods to your children with other foods. Try it with cereal, in smoothies or with meals.
- **Stir it.** Mix milk with your other foods. Prepare oatmeal or soups with milk instead of water.
- **Slice it.** Choose cheeses that are naturally lower in lactose such as Cheddar, Monterey Jack and Swiss.
- **Shred it.** Sprinkle salads, vegetables and casseroles with shredded cheese to add more dairy foods to your child.
- **Spoon it.** Try yogurts in your favorite flavors. Read the label to be sure they have live and active cultures.

**Reviewed by: Jenni Kinsey, MS, RD, LD & Hasina Rakotomanana, MS.**

#### References:

USDA.(2017) *Nibbles for Health*. Retrieved from: <https://www.fns.usda.gov/tn/nibbles-health-nutrition-newsletters-parents-young-children>

National Dairy Council. (2018). *What is Lactose Intolerance?* Retrieved from: <https://www.nationaldairycouncil.org/sitecore/content/dg/home/content/2016/lactose-intolerance-facts>