

Yogurt - Topic of the Month

JULY 3, 2024

In 2014, yogurt was introduced as an option in the child and adult WIC food packages as a substitute for fluid milk. Yogurt provides a choice for participants who choose not to or are unable to drink adequate milk due to lactose intolerance or for other reasons. This memo focuses on yogurt's benefits and commonly asked questions.

Benefits

Yogurt is made by fermenting milk with a starter bacteria (probiotics) and leaving it to sit at a warm temperature (110°) for several hours. The bacteria help to convert the milk (lactose) to lactic acid to create a thickened product. Since it is made from milk, yogurt contains many of the same nutrients including calcium and vitamins A, B2, B12, zinc, phosphorus, potassium. Because some of the whey (liquid) is removed when making yogurt from milk, it is also a more concentrated source of nutrients (protein and essential fatty acids) and is lower in lactose.

Yogurt has been associated with benefits in improving gut and bone health, strengthening immunities, and having a positive health effect in incidences of diabetes, cancer, and cardiovascular diseases. Many people who are sensitive to lactose find they can safely eat yogurt.

Unlike fluid milk which has vitamin D added, many WIC-allowed yogurts do not contain vitamin D. Getting into the practice of checking [the nutrition facts label](#) will help families to understand more about the product they are choosing.

Learn more about the benefits of yogurt: [9 Ways Yogurt Can Help Your Body](#) (National Dairy Council).

Probiotics

The word "probiotic" means "for life" and refers to living organisms that can result in health benefits when eaten in adequate amounts. The two most commonly found genus of probiotics are Lactobacillus and Bifidobacterium.

The biggest health benefit associated with probiotics is improving digestive health by populating the gut with "good" bacteria, yet it serves other functions such as aiding in the breakdown and absorption of certain nutrients.

Not all yogurts contain live bacteria cultures by the time the yogurt is packaged. To identify a yogurt with live probiotics, look for the words "live and active cultures" on the product label.

WIC allowed yogurt

Yogurt may be offered in the child and adult WIC food packages if the participant chooses. Participants may select any WIC allowed brand or flavor in 32 oz containers. WIC yogurts must also meet federal regulations, be made from cow's milk, and contain ≤ 40 gm of total sugar (about 10 tsp) per cup and no artificial sweeteners.

Children under age 2 are allowed whole fat yogurt.

Children over age 2 and adult participants receive low-fat and nonfat yogurt choices.

Yogurt



32 oz containers only

Any brand

- Pasteurized
- Any flavor
- Greek OK

⊗ DO NOT BUY

- Organic
- Artificial sweeteners such as sucralose (**Splenda**) or aspartame
- Yogurt with more than 40g sugar per cup

WIC TIP If your WIC Account Balance lists **Low-fat / Nonfat Yogurt**, make sure you see these words on the front of your yogurt container.




Greek yogurt

Greek yogurt is also allowed on the WIC food package in 32 oz containers. For Greek yogurt, more whey is removed during the production which results in a yogurt that is thicker and creamier in texture. On average, Greek yogurt has twice the amount of protein of regular yogurt and has less lactose and total sugar but may also have less calcium due to the screening process. It is important to remind participants that nutrient content will vary for different brands; they should compare the nutrition facts label on products to determine which is the best choice for them.

Yogurt for babies

Yogurt is not part of the WIC food package until a baby's first birthday, but small amounts of *unsweetened*, whole milk yogurt may be introduced after 6 months. Encourage participants to avoid "baby yogurts" since they tend to be full of sugar. If participants have concerns about allergies, they should talk to their doctor before introducing yogurt or any other high allergenic food ([Food Allergies](#)).

Gelatin in yogurt

Some yogurts do contain gelatin. Participants who follow a halal, kosher, vegetarian or vegan diet may want to avoid gelatin. If gelatin is a concern for a participant, show them how to read the ingredient list to identify whether gelatin is present or not. Because manufacturers

frequently change product ingredients, reading the label is the most accurate way to determine what is in the product.

Carbohydrates in yogurt

Yogurt contains natural carbohydrates from milk and any fruit that may be added. Plain yogurt contains only natural carbohydrates. Flavored yogurt usually has sugar added to it, although some fruit yogurts may state “lower in sugar” on the label.

Not WIC allowed:

- Yogurts sweetened with artificial sweeteners, such as Splenda or Aspartame.
- Yogurt with added fruit or other mix in ingredients.

Keeping it fresh

The fermentation process used to make yogurt extends its shelf life in comparison to milk. An unopened container of yogurt will keep longer than an unopened container of milk. It is recommended that yogurt be used within seven days of opening it.

Reminders for participants:

- Always use a clean spoon and scoop yogurt from the large container into a separate bowl instead of eating directly from the container.
- Store yogurt covered in the refrigerator at 40 degrees.
- Look for the “use by” date on the package to check for freshness.

Supporting participants

We can support participants by helping them identify the yogurt they have chosen on their WIC food package. The practice tips below can help us help our participants.

- At subsequent visits, ask if the participant was able to find the yogurt chosen for their food package (This is a great time to ask about other foods as well!)
- If a participant is having difficulty finding a WIC-allowed yogurt, use a pictorial to identify one that they may prefer or that might be found at the store where the family shops.
- Use empty cartons to demonstrate where to find “32 oz.” on the label, as well as any other useful information, low-fat/nonfat or whole, and the nutrition facts label.
- Visuals are especially helpful for new participants and those with Limited English Proficiency.
- If the participant is interested in the WIC Food Finder phone app, help download it while in the WIC office and demonstrate how to use it with a sample WIC food container.

- If the participant is struggling with how to use the yogurt in their food package, try offering some of the creative ways yogurt can be used (see below) or check and see if they might prefer a different option.

Creative ways to use yogurt

- Top yogurt with your favorite WIC cereal and fruit for a yummy meal or snack.
- Serve fruit flavored yogurt as a dip with fresh fruit.
- Make a smoothie: ½ cup of WIC juice, ½ cup plain yogurt, ½-1 cup of your favorite frozen fruit. Blend until smooth.
- Make yogurt popsicles: Blend yogurt with fresh fruit. Pour into small plastic cups. Add a popsicle stick and freeze overnight.
- Substitute Greek yogurt for any recipe that calls for sour cream or use half yogurt and half sour cream for a lower fat sour cream.
- Combine 1 cup yogurt and 1 Tbsp peanut butter for a high-protein snack. Top with fruit or granola.

Resources used

1. [Shopping Guide](#) (Minnesota Department of Health, WIC Program. 2023)
2. [WIC Food Packages](#) (United States Department of Agriculture, Food and Nutrition Services. April 2024)
3. [Yogurt](#) (Harvard T.H. Chan School of Public Nutrition. November 2019)
4. [Beneficial Effects of Yoghurt and Probiotic Fermented Milks and Their Functional Food Potentials](#) (National Library of Medicine. Foods. Sept. 2022)

References- complete listing of hyperlinks:

[The nutrition facts label \(www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PLey4Qe-UxcxaZlZKEArX33qrQvrHfixv4\)](http://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PLey4Qe-UxcxaZlZKEArX33qrQvrHfixv4)

[Food Allergies \(www.fda.gov/food/food-labeling-nutrition/food-allergies\)](http://www.fda.gov/food/food-labeling-nutrition/food-allergies)

[WIC Food Packages \(www.fns.usda.gov/wic/food-packages\)](http://www.fns.usda.gov/wic/food-packages)

[Yogurt \(https://nutritionsource.hsph.harvard.edu/food-features/yogurt\)](https://nutritionsource.hsph.harvard.edu/food-features/yogurt)

[Beneficial Effects of Yoghurt and Probiotic Fermented Milks and Their Functional Food Potentials \(www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC9455928\)](http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC9455928)

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