FLAVORED MILK
ISSUES BACKGROUNDER

REVIEWED AND UPDATED 8/2024

BACKGROUND/WHY IT MATTERS

Dairy consumption falls below recommended amounts by 4 years of age, on average, and continues to fall below recommended consumption levels with increasing age. Therefore, ensuring that white or flavored milk is served at each meal, especially for children, could be a key strategy to help reverse these trends. All flavored milk – whether reduced-fat, low-fat or fat-free – provides the same nutrients as white milk, including calcium, potassium, phosphorus, protein, vitamins A, D and B_{12}, riboflavin and niacin (niacin equivalents).

Flavored milk is cow's milk with added sweetener and flavoring such as chocolate, strawberry or vanilla. White milk is more commonly consumed and therefore makes a larger contribution to children's vitamin and mineral intakes. However, American school-aged children who drink flavored milk tend to have higher total milk and nutrient intakes, but not higher BMIs or added sugar intakes. Flavored milk's nutrient contributions compare favorably with its share of added sugars (an average of 4 percent) in children and adolescent's daily diets, which is significantly less than what is contributed by sugar sweetened beverages (SSBs) such as soda and fruit drinks. Therefore, flavored milk is one option to help children meet their dairy and nutrient needs.

About two-thirds of the milk served in schools is flavored, mostly chocolate. The dairy community has been proactively working to improve flavored milk, while maintaining the good taste that kids love. Since 2007, the U.S. dairy community has reduced added sugars by 54 percent in the flavored milk offered in schools. Today, all milk in schools is low-fat or fat-free, and the average flavored milk served in school has 126 calories – just 29 more calories than white milk.

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- No matter the flavor, milk delivers great taste and a unique package of essential nutrients.
- All cow's milk varieties are packed with nutrition essential for kids' growth. Flavored milk is a terrific way for kids, teens and adults to enjoy milk and get the same 13 essential nutrients found in every 8-ounce glass of white milk, while contributing only 4 percent of added sugars children and adolescents consume daily.
- Many children are not meeting dietary recommendations for milk. Offering nutrient-rich flavored milk might encourage them to drink more.
- Leading nutrition and health organizations agree that improving the taste of nutrient-dense foods such as whole grain cereal, flavored milk and yogurt by adding small amounts of sugar within a healthy dietary pattern, especially for children, is a better use of added sugars than in nutrient-poor, highly sweetened foods and beverages.
- For some people, the calories from sugar in flavored milk are a worthwhile trade-off for all of the nutrients milk provides.
- Dairy farmers and dairy companies have taken action to reduce added sugars in flavored milk available to schools, which means fewer calories and less added sugar. Today, all milk in schools is low-fat or fat-free, and the average flavored milk served in schools has 126 calories – just 29 more calories than white milk.

DIFFICULT QUESTIONS

Are health and nutrition organizations in favor of flavored milk for children?
When it comes to the health of your family, it's important to seek the advice of credible experts. The nation's leading health and nutrition organizations recognize the valuable role that milk, including flavored milk, can play in meeting daily nutrient needs. The Dietary Guidelines for Americans and the American Academy of Pediatrics recognize that a small amount of added sugars, which fall within the daily calorie limit, can be used to increase the palatability and appeal of nutrient-rich foods, such as low-fat flavored milk. The 2020 Dietary Guidelines, the American Academy of Pediatrics, and the American Heart Association recognize that a small amount of added sugars can be used to increase the palatability and appeal of nutrient-dense foods, such as fat-free chocolate milk.

Won't the extra calories and sugar in flavored milk make my child gain weight?
Conscientious parents want to do all they can to help their children stay healthy. Limiting the amount of added sugars a child consumes is one good place to start. While flavored milk contains some added calories from sugar, there is no evidence that milk, flavored or unflavored, is linked to increased body mass index (BMI) in youth. This is likely because flavored milk contributes, on average, 4 percent of the added sugars to children's (ages 2-18) daily diets, while soft drinks and non-carbonated sweetened beverages contribute about 40 percent. Therefore, limiting the amount of nutrient-poor sugar-sweetened soft drinks, and other sweets and desserts, will likely be a more effective and healthy way to reduce a child's consumption of added sugars than eliminating nutrient-rich flavored milk.

Does chocolate in milk affect calcium absorption?
No. Chocolate milk contains a small amount of oxalic acid, a compound found in cocoa beans and other plants that in sufficient quantities can affect calcium absorption. The very small amount of this compound in chocolate milk has no significant effect on the amount of calcium absorbed from milk. All milk, whether flavored or unflavored, is an excellent source of calcium contributing to bone health throughout life.

How much caffeine is in chocolate milk?
An 8-ounce serving of chocolate milk contains approximately 2 milligrams of caffeine. According to the American Academy of Pediatrics, flavored dairy foods, such as chocolate milk, account for less than 5 percent of total daily caffeine intake in the collective diets of children and young adults (ages 2-22). In contrast, close to 60-90 percent of caffeine consumption comes from coffee, tea and soda in this age group, with soda being the largest contributor.

LINKS/RESOURCES

- NDC: Is Chocolate Milk Better Than White Milk for Kids? (3/2024)
- NDC: Chocolate Milk Nutrition Facts: 13 Essential Nutrients & More (3/2023)
- Science Summary: Milk as a Recommended Beverage (2021)
- American Academy of Pediatrics policy statement: Snacks, Sweetened Beverages, Added Sugars, and Schools (3/2015)
- American Academy of Pediatrics: Optimizing Bone Health in Children and Adolescents (10/2014)