

# How to Select the Best DAIRY



## HOW TO SELECT:

- Dairy products include milk and products made from milk that is derived from an animal. While dairy most commonly comes from cows, sheep and goat milk\* is also readily available. Dairy includes products such as cheese, yogurt, cottage cheese, sour cream, cream cheese, ice cream, butter, and more.
- The primary types of milk sold in stores are whole milk (approx. 3.5% milk fat), reduced-fat milk (2% total milk fat), low-fat or skim milk (1% total milk fat), and fat-free. For reference, milk contains approximately 3-4% milk fat straight from the cow.
- Always check the dates on the packaging to ensure you buy fresh dairy products.

## STORAGE:

- Dairy products should be frozen or refrigerated, unless it is a shelf-stable product, such as powdered (dry) milk, canned milk, or butter. (That's right, butter can be left out at room temperature, although the USDA recommends leaving out for only 1 or 2 days to prevent it from going rancid.)<sup>1</sup>
- Milk generally can be kept in the refrigerator for about two weeks after purchase. As a rule of thumb, try to use most dairy products within 1-5 days of the labeled 'sell by' date. Use your senses to determine if the dairy product is safe to consume – immediately discard if it smells off, changes in texture, or is moldy.
- Most dairy products freeze easily, although you may notice changes in texture after thawing. Milk can be frozen for up to 3 months, ice cream for up to 2 months, and butter for 6-9 months. Always thaw in the refrigerator.

## NUTRITION:

- Milk contains 9 essential nutrients, including calcium, protein, and vitamins A, D, and B12. 1 glass of milk contains approximately 300 milligrams of calcium. Milk helps strengthen bones, muscles, and immune systems.
- One serving is equivalent to one cup (8 fluid ounces) of milk, 1 cup of yogurt, or approximately 2 ounces of cheese. The USDA recommends that adults consume 2-3 servings of dairy products daily.<sup>1</sup>

## LABELS YOU MIGHT NOTICE:

- **Pasteurized:** Pasteurization is a process required of all milk and milk products intended for direct human consumption by the federal government.<sup>1</sup> Pasteurization is a process which heats the milk to kill any bacteria in the milk that may be harmful or cause the milk to spoil. This process improves the safety and quality of milk and milk products.
- **Homogenized:** Homogenization is a process which gives milk its smooth texture and makes it look and taste creamier. Homogenization simply reduces the size of fat globules in the milk so that they are dispersed evenly in the milk. Without homogenization, cream (fat) would rise to the top and the milk would have to be shaken to achieve the smooth texture we expect.
- **A2 Milk:** Cow's milk that contains only the A2 type of beta-casein protein rather than the more common A1 protein, which impacts how our bodies digest the milk. People with milk intolerance often find that they can consume A2 milk without discomfort.
- **Lactose-free Milk:** Lactose-free milk has the benefits of regular milk but contains lactase, an enzyme that helps break down lactose. It makes the milk taste sweeter. People with lactose intolerance often find that they can drink lactose-free milk without discomfort.
- **UHT Milk:** UHT, or ultra-high temperature pasteurized, milk is milk that undergoes a special pasteurization process that increases its shelf life and, depending on the product, allows it to go unrefrigerated for about 3 months. The only difference is that, during pasteurization, UHT milk is heated to a higher temperature.
- **Natural:** Generally recognized as a product containing no artificial ingredients, added color, or chemical preservatives, and is only minimally processed (processed so the product is not fundamentally changed).<sup>1</sup>
- **Organic:** Identifies practices employed while raising or growing the product. In organic production, animals are raised in living conditions freely accommodating their natural behaviors (like the ability to graze on pasture), fed 100% organic feed and forage, and not administered antibiotics or hormones at any point during the animal's lifetime. The organic label does not indicate that the product has safety, quality, or nutritional attributes that are any higher than conventionally raised products.<sup>1</sup>
- **Antibiotic-free:** All dairy products in the grocery store are antibiotic-free. When antibiotics are used, withdrawal periods are observed that allow ample time for the antibiotic to completely exit the animal's system after it was last administered. Milk produced by cows being treated with antibiotics is immediately discarded during treatment and the full labeled withdrawal period.<sup>1</sup>
- **Raised without Antibiotics:** While dairy products in the grocery store contain antibiotics, this label denotes that no antibiotics were used to treat illnesses during the cows' lifetime.
- **Raised without Hormones/No Added Hormones:** All animals naturally have hormones, therefore all dairy products will naturally contain a small amount of hormones. These labels are indicators that the cows were raised with no supplemental hormones. Supplemental hormones are sometimes used with cattle to help promote healthy growth and are regulated by the FDA and USDA. Research on the effects of using hormones in livestock production have not found any impact on human health.<sup>2</sup>
- **Raised without rbST:** rbST is short for recombinant bovine somatotropin, which is a type of artificial growth hormone given to dairy cattle that increases milk production. This does not affect the quality or nutritional value of the milk. This label is the same as "raised without hormones" or "no added hormones."
- **Grass-fed:** Cows spend their entire lives grazing and eating from pastures. Supplemental feed may include hay and forages when grass is not as readily available. Grass-fed cows are never offered grain as part of their diet.

*\*Note that almond milk, soy milk, and other milks are plant-based products and are not classified as dairy products.*

<sup>1</sup> Source: United States Department of Agriculture

<sup>2</sup> Source: Stewart, L. 2013. Implanting beef cattle. Univ. of Georgia. Bulletin 1302