



## About Dairy Products

*Milk is the best of all nutritive substances... Through its kindred or similar properties, it augments the quality of ojas in the body. —Sushrut Samhita*

### Understanding Dairy

Many health food approaches today encourage people to eliminate dairy products from their diet. According to their theories, many symptoms and ailments are caused by dairy intake, including mucus congestion, arthritis, and others.

Ayurveda, however, recommends intake of milk and certain dairy products, especially for those with vata and pitta constitutions, or imbalances in either of these doshas. This is because of milk's inherent strengthening and vitalizing effect, and also because it is the food substance most easily converted to sukra and ojas in the body. Ojas is the subtlest material aspect of the body through which intelligence flows and on which the strength and immunity of the body depends.

These two points of view can be reconciled when we understand more deeply the effect dairy products have on digestion and on the three doshas. In short, if prepared or consumed improperly, dairy products can produce negative effects. However, if consumed according to Ayurvedic guidelines, they are a very useful and health-promoting aspect of the diet.

The proper use of dairy products relies on three major factors: (1) The quality of the milk from which they are made, (2) The method of preparation of the milk or milk product, (3) How we eat them, at what time, and in combination with what other foods, and ultimately, (4) How well we digest them once consumed.

The main points to remember:

### QUALITY

1. Milk for drinking, or for use in cooking or preparing other dairy products such as yogurt, should be of the highest quality. It should be from cows fed on pesticide-free grass, who are not given hormones or antibiotics, and be non-homogenized. "Grass-grazed, pastured or grass-fed."
2. Organic ghee is now available in most whole foods markets.

### PREPARATION AND CONSUMPTION

*Cold or unboiled milk is extremely heavy, and serves to increase the slimy secretions of the organs, whereas by boiling it is freed from those injurious traits.*

—Sushrut Samhita

#### A. MILK

1. Milk should be brought to a rolling boil before drinking or using to make yogurt, and should be drunk while still hot or warm.
2. Ideally, milk should be "thrice-boiled," meaning brought to a boil, removed from heat until the boiling settles, then put back on the heat until it boils again, and this process repeated yet a third time. This is said to make the milk most digestible and healthful.
3. Milk should be consumed only with foods with sweet taste including breads, rice, grains, cereals, and "sweets."
4. Milk should not be eaten along with a meal which includes other tastes (i.e., is not appropriate as an accompaniment to most luncheon or dinner menus.)
5. Also, milk should not be consumed with raw fruits or fruit juices except mango, raisins or dates. This is due to the sour taste of most fruit (including bananas which have a sour "post-digestive" taste,) that disturbs the digestion of the milk. Also, it should not be consumed with salty foods, such as salty crackers or pretzels, for the same reason. Disturbed digestion leads to ama and negative after effects.
6. Fresh heavy cream has properties different from milk and may be used in moderation with fresh fruit and in cooking for soups, vegetable dishes, pasta, etc.

#### B. CURDS

1. Any food that is made from curdled liquid is referred in Ayurveda as "curd." These include cheese, cottage cheese, buttermilk, yogurt, sour cream and tofu (soybean curd.)

**Curds must never be eaten in the evening or night** due to their tendency to obstruct the channels (srotas,) of the body. Obstruction of the srotas is one of the most

fundamental factors in disease production according to Ayurveda. It is a major cause of arthritis, sinusitis, respiratory problems, and the breakdown in immunity that leads to a host of other disorders.

In fact, curdled foods should not be eaten on a daily basis for most people, or the cumulative effect will be increased ama and blockage of the srotas.

In addition, curds should be consumed while very fresh. By Ayurvedic standards, any commercially sold yogurt or cheese is too old to be considered “fresh.”

### **1. Yogurt**

Yogurt should be prepared at home in the evening, and consumed the next day. Refrigerating it and letting it sit for more than one day increases the sourness and “stickiness” of the curd and when consumed, it will tend to obstruct the srotas or circulatory channels. Its sour quality will also tend to aggravate pitta and kapha. It would be better not to eat yogurt at all than to eat commercially-prepared brands or to eat homemade yogurt that is more than a day old.

### **2. Cheese**

As explained above, cheese should not be eaten in the evening (no midnight pizzas!) Solid cheeses available in the supermarket tend to increase pitta and kapha. The “sharper” the cheese, the more pitta increasing effect it has. Cheese is generally more easily digested during the winter months, when the agni (digestive power) is strongest. Cheese may be taken in small quantities at lunch time, up to 2-3 times a week, if desired, unless recommended otherwise by your physician.

Cottage cheese, fresh mozzarella, fresh goat cheese and ricotta cheese are more easily digested and are recommended in general over solid cheeses.

Homemade cheese, called “panir,” is the best cheese to consume on a regular basis. It is much preferable to commercial cheeses and may be eaten daily at lunch time. (Recipe available.) Panir balances both vata and pitta. Sautee in a healthful oil with turmeric and other spices to further enhance digestibility. May also be crumbled and cooked with chopped greens to reduce the kapha or heavy effect.

Soy cheese are curds and should be eaten according to the same guidelines as dairy cheeses.

### **3. Tofu**

Tofu is a protein-rich, low-fat curd which is available in commercial brands which are acceptable. The soft variety is recommended.

Overall, tofu or tempeh is more easily digested than solid soy or dairy cheese and is preferred over solid cheeses for regular consumption.

Tofu is a curd and should not be eaten in the evening. However, at lunch time or as a breakfast food is acceptable.

Due to 2 independent research studies linking moderate mid-life tofu consumption to increased risk of cognitive decline later in life, we recommend that tofu be limited to no more than once a week.

### **C. Frozen desserts: ice cream, frozen yogurt, etc.**

These foods are the epitome of kapha-aggravating and digestion-suppressing foods. Due to their extreme coldness, they suppress the digestive “fire” (acids and enzymes, which are temperature dependent.) In addition, they are a dairy product, are very sweet, and, in the case of ice cream, high in fat, which all contribute to a kapha-increasing effect.

If you have mucus congestion; sinus, ear, nose, or throat problems; allergies, asthma, arthritis, digestive problems, overweight, or nearly any other health problem, you would do well to strictly avoid these frozen desserts.

If you are very healthy, have strong pitta in your constitution, and it is very warm outside, you may eat these occasionally if you strongly desire them. It is better to eat them in the afternoon and not right after eating, to avoid interfering with the digestion of the meal.

### **GOAT’S MILK**

Often goat’s milk is tolerated when cow’s milk is not. Goat’s milk is more balancing to kapha and pitta doshas and has very good effects on the liver and pitta imbalance according to Ayurveda. It should be boiled and drunk while warm, just as for cow’s milk.

### **DIGESTION**

Use of Lactaid milk for lactose intolerant individuals is acceptable, however, measures should be taken to strengthen the digestive capacity so that Lactaid is not necessary.

Many individuals with milk intolerance find that if they boil the milk first, ideally with a pinch cardamom, turmeric or fresh ginger root, drink it warm, and avoid consuming it with other than sweet-tasting foods, they no longer have any problems digesting milk.