

PENNY SAVER NEWS

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Going Greek

One of the new categories of food from 2010 that seems to be going strong on shelves is Greek yogurt. Not that it's necessarily Greek, certainly not from Greece, but the 'Greek' style yogurt is definitely different from our regular yogurt. If you've ever stuck a spoon into a cup of it you certainly noticed the difference.

Greek yogurt is much thicker. Forget the runny drinkable yogurts, Greek yogurt is almost solid. It's a much better substitute for sour cream to make dips or thicken sauces – think stroganoff without all the fat. It works instead of softened cream cheese in some recipes too! It feels just as creamy in the mouth. Some folks say they can only eat half as much because it's so thick. If that's the case for you, go for it!

That thickness does mean that the nutrients are more concentrated too. In comparison to regular fat free yogurt, plain fat free Greek yogurt has about the same number of calories and sodium, both have no fat. The big differences come in the amounts of calcium, protein and carbohydrate. And as with all yogurt, you have to watch those fruity flavors, they have plenty of extra sugar.

Most Greek yogurt starts out the same as regular yogurt. Certain kinds of bacteria are added to milk. The kinds of bacteria determine the final flavor. Most of the bacteria used to make yogurt are very good for our intestinal health. As they turn the milk sugar into acid the milk sours and thickens. That's yogurt. But Greek yogurt goes one step further. The yogurt is strained or drained to allow more of the liquid to drip out. The more liquid (the whey) is removed, the thicker the final yogurt becomes.

Lucky for us, most of the nutrients we want from milk and yogurt stay behind, caught in the thickness. That means that on average Greek yogurt has 2 to 3 times as much protein, 2 to 3 times as much calcium, and as much or double the amount of carbohydrate as regular yogurt. Yogurt in general and Greek yogurts especially are good sources of calcium for our bones and blood pressure. The calcium in milk is very easy to absorb.

Protein is probably the nutrient that helps most with making us feel full. Protein also keeps us feeling full longer. So after a breakfast of Greek yogurt we're less likely to be headed for the snack machine by mid-morning. Dairy protein is a good quality protein as well.

It's just those pesky carbohydrates that might be problems. The bacteria that make yogurt do a good job of breaking down most of the milk sugar. For this reason people who are lactose intolerant can usually eat yogurt without stomach problems. But when we start adding fruit and flavors, the added sugars really go up. It's true in regular as well as Greek yogurt. Some of the small containers, only $\frac{3}{4}$ of a cup, have as much as 22 g of sugar, most of it added sugar. That's over 4 teaspoons of sugar in a container! Plus, some Greek yogurt uses added starches, gums or thickeners to make it thick and creamy. These could add carbs too. Read the label!

If you like the creamy feel of Greek yogurt, check the labels. In most cases you'll see that buying plain yogurt gives you more of the good stuff and less of extras. Then stir in some mashed fruit, your own dollop of honey, or splurge on a teaspoon of jam or jelly. You'll have a better flavor and a lot less added sugar.

If you want to make your own Greek yogurt, line a sieve with a couple layers of

coffee filters, set it over a bowl, and add yogurt. Leave it drip in the refrigerator between ½ hr to 6 hours or even longer. The longer it drips, the thicker it will be.

Here's an easy muffin with higher than usual calcium and protein because of the yogurt ingredient. They'll be great for a fast breakfast or easy snack.

Very Berry Muffins

½ cup skim milk

¼ cup vegetable oil

6 oz Greek yogurt, vanilla or honey flavor

1 egg

1 ¾ cups all purpose flour

2 ½ tsp baking powder

½ tsp baking soda

½ tsp salt (optional)

1 Tbsp grated orange zest

1 Tbsp orange or lemon juice

¾ cup fresh or frozen strawberries, diced into small pieces

Preheat oven to 400°F. Put a paper liner in the cups of a muffin pan. In large bowl combine milk, yogurt and egg. Beat until combined. Add all other ingredients except fruit. Stir just until combined. Stir in fruit. Divide into the 12 muffin cups. Bake 16-18 minutes. Cool 5 minutes in pan, then remove to rack to cool. Makes 12 muffins.