

**PENNY SAVER NEWS**

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April 17, 2008

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## Saying Cheese the Low Fat Way

Aside from goofy grins when someone takes our pictures, Americans say “Cheese” an awful lot, about 30 pounds apiece according to the California Milk Advisory Board. That’s how much cheese our average national yearly consumption is. But when you consider that some people don’t eat any cheese at all, there must be some who are eating a lot more.

How do we eat so much? A lot of it is in or on other foods. Think of pizza, cheeseburgers, nachos, mac’n’cheese, lasagna and a few salads. Yum! Some of it goes to flavoring all those cheesy chip and snack foods. And then there are the tons of it we buy in slices and chunks from the supermarket. This goes into our sandwiches, onto our salads or just into our mouths as snacks.

From the numbers, the most popular kind of natural cheese in the US is definitely cheddar. American cheese is the second most popular, but this is either a blended cheese or a process cheese, usually a mixture of cheddar and Colby. Mozzarella, the stretchy, stringy pizza topper comes in third. We only eat half as much of it as we do of cheddar.

All that flavor is wonderful, but what about our health? Should we be eating so much? It depends on which cheese you choose. Regular cheddar cheese can be as much as one third fat, and most of that is saturated fat. That’s the ‘bad’ kind of fat, because it’s what our livers turn into cholesterol. An ounce, 28 grams, of cheddar

cheese has 9.4 g of fat, and 6 of them are saturated. At 30 pounds a year, that's just about 10 pounds of fat per person. Oh, our aching arteries!

American cheese is just about the same as cheddar, high fat and high saturated fat. Mozzarella made with whole milk is still better than cheddar, with only 6 g of total fat. Most mozzarella is made with part skim milk. That means more protein and half the fat, only 4.5 g per ounce.

But there are healthier alternatives! Several companies now make reduced fat cheddar cheese. The 75% reduced fat cheddar cheese has only 2.5 g of fat per ounce, instead of 9 g. There are also light mozzarella sticks (strings) with only 2.5 g of fat per stick. That can be a very healthy snack. If you tried some low fat cheese years ago and gave up because they tasted so bad, please go try again. Most of the newer ones on the market taste great, much better than you remember.

Cooking with low fat cheese does need a few adjustments. Fat is what allows cheese to melt so nicely. When the fat is removed, what's left is protein. Protein in cheese, just like a lean piece of beef, gets tough when it's over-cooked. To avoid tough, dry cheese when you cook low fat, add the cheese at the last minute. Sprinkle it on top of your dish and just barely heat it, only 5 to 8 minutes in the oven, even less in the microwave. Or, hide it in the center of a casserole instead of on top. That way the heat gets to it last, just before the dish is done cooking.

Adding cheese to your menu is a good way to increase your daily dose of calcium and potassium. Both of these minerals are good for your bones, your nerves and your blood pressure. Of course you need to watch out for the sodium. Part of what helps preserve many kinds of cheese is the salt. When you use cheese reduce the

sodium in the rest of your daily menu to keep it balanced.

Here's an Americanized version of a recipe I got from a German friend. Hers used green peas but I've tried it with white beans, and black-eyed peas work well too. A mixture of red and green peppers adds color, cheddar cheese with jalapeño peppers adds heat. Adjust the hot sauce to your taste.

#### Marinated Bean and Cheese Salad

2 cans great northern beans or black eyed peas	1/3 C diced onions
1/2 C diced green or red bell peppers	1/3 C canola or olive oil
1/2 C finely diced low fat sharp cheddar cheese	1/3 C vinegar
1 tsp garlic salt	1/2 tsp ground pepper

hot sauce to taste (2 - 4 dashes)

Drain beans, rinse and drain again. Combine all ingredients in large bowl. Cover and refrigerate at least 4 hours, up to 3 days. Serves 4-6 as main dish salad.

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