

# Greek Yogurt is No Fad

By Leah Parodi

Food fads come and go with some being quite healthy while others not so much. New to the food fad scene is Greek yogurt and with it questions of just how good is it for you and is it better than regular yogurt? To help answer these and other nutritionally based questions, Martha Nepper of the Methodist Diabetes and Nutritional Health Center volunteered her time to discuss the many benefits of not only Greek, but all yogurts.

At the Methodist Center for Diabetes and Nutritional Health in Omaha, trained specialists such as certified diabetes educators, nurses and dietitians help those in areas such diabetes, nutrition, weight management and diseases like Crohns, celiac and irritable bowel syndrome.

Martha Nepper, MS, RD, CDE, is a Program Coordinator for Life Shapes for Kids & Teens and is certified in Child and Adolescent Weight Management for Methodist Health System.

Ms. Nepper has been a registered dietitian for over 20 years and is a certified diabetes educator and specializes in weight management, specifically for child and adult weight management. She works with a variety of people with weight issues and her goal is to inspire people to pay attention to what they eat.

Ms. Nepper recommends, as a basic every day tool for weight management, to keep a food journal.

"As a rule of thumb it's important to write in a daily log to see where your nutritional gaps are," she says. "This way you can see if you are eating fruits, vegetables and drinking milk. Writing things down pinpoints gaps. It is also a good idea to make a grocery list as it is helpful when you go to the store, you only put in your cart what is on your list."

Ms. Nepper also recommends that when you get home from the grocery store, open your fridge and put healthy foods in front so that you can immediately see yogurt, fruits and vegetables. She says it is important to set yourself up to eat healthy and make good decisions. "Place a bowl of fruit vs. cookies on your counter, this important for not only for you, but for your family. Parents are role models, if we eat right so will our kids."

As for the Greek yogurt debate, we begin with the pros. "Greek yogurt has many benefits," says Ms. Nepper. "For one, it has more protein and averages 15 to 20 grams of protein per serving which is equal to that of a serving of 2 to 3 ounces of lean meat. That means Greek yogurt will keep you feeling full, which is good for weight management. Another benefit of Greek yogurt is that it is strained three times to remove whey and that lowers the amount of sugar. When shopping for Greek yogurts look at higher grams of protein and lower grams sugar, preferably in the single digits."

As far as the cons of Greek yogurt, Ms. Nepper says that the flavor and texture does not appeal to all, but as there are so many varieties and different brands, there is a Greek yogurt for everybody.

"There are fruit flavored Greek yogurts, however, that can mean more sugar. You don't have to mix in all of the fruit that is at bottom. Or you can get plain Greek yogurt and add fresh fruit, your favorite cereal or granola, it's all about trial and error."

Greek yogurt certainly has many benefits, but is it better than regular yogurt? "Greek yogurt has more protein than regular yogurt but it is better to have any yogurt because of the calcium. Regular yogurt has a little bit more calcium than Greek yogurt due to Greek yogurt having been strained three times removing whey whereas regular yogurt has only been strained two times. Dietitians like Greek yogurt because of the high protein and lower sugar. But regular yogurt has calcium which is essential for good health, when choosing regular yogurts opt for light or fat free and lower sugar."

Ms. Nepper does suggest giving plain Greek yogurt a test run. "Try plain Greek yogurt, it is very nutritional and you can add your own fresh fruit. It has the lowest sugar and the highest protein. Use it instead of sour cream; add to your baked potato. There are many ways you can add it to your diet."

The end result of the yogurt debate is to try to add any yogurt to your daily diet for not only the protein but for the calcium. Ms. Nepper says that dairy in our daily diet is extremely important, especially for 9 to 18 year olds who need 1300 milligrams per day for making strong bones.

"That is four servings of milk or combinations of



Martha Nepper, MS, RD, CDE

milk, cheese and yogurt. Dairy is also extremely important for post-menopausal women whose estrogen levels drop. They need 1200 milligrams each day. Pregnant women too, need dairy." Ms. Nepper says that for the rest of us calcium does not only help strengthen bones but reduces blood pressure and helps with weight loss. And she advises to not discount milk, which in addition to calcium also has proteins, vitamins and carbohydrates.

Ms. Nepper makes a last point about food fads and diets. "Sometimes the media promotes new

diets and weight loss programs. I would encourage you to ask yourself if you are you removing a food group that can cause you to become nutritionally deficient. Ask yourself if it is too rigid. Food is meant for us to eat, enjoy, share with family and you should feel good after eating. If a program or diet is too rigid, eliminates exercise, promises fast weight loss, these could be red flags."

For more information on the Methodist Diabetes and Nutritional Health Center visit **[bestcare.org](http://bestcare.org)**.