Greek Yogurt

Ingredient of the Month

Presented by ACFEF Chef & Child Foundation and Clemson University
In the U.S., Greek yogurt has gone from being virtually nonexistent to taking up entire refrigerated sections at almost every grocery store. What gives? Or, more importantly, what is Greek yogurt and where did it come from? Greece is the obvious guess, but the history of where this yogurt originated is unclear. This is because Greek yogurt, or “strained yogurt,” is common in South Asia, the East Mediterranean, the Middle East, the U.S. and Greece.

Greek yogurt is created from a centuries-old technique of straining out liquid whey, creating a thick, creamy yogurt without the addition of gums, thickeners or milk fat. This straining method makes Greek yogurt not only denser, but also provides twice the protein, less lactose and fewer carbs than regular yogurt. While it can be eaten as a healthy snack sweetened with honey and berries, Greek yogurt is also a great cooking ingredient. It can be used in everything from savory sauces to sweet baked goods.

Healthy ingredient contribution

**CALCIUM:** Like most yogurts, Greek yogurt is an excellent source of calcium. Calcium is a key component of bones and teeth, helping to form and maintain their strong structure. Many processes in the human body need calcium to function. If your body doesn’t get enough calcium from your diet, it can take calcium from your bones.

**PROTEIN:** Greek yogurt contains a high concentration of all-natural protein. Protein is a powerful, muscle-building nutrient that helps deliver steady and sustained energy throughout your day.

**VITAMIN D:** Greek yogurt is also a source of vitamin D. Our bodies need vitamin D to absorb calcium and build and maintain strong bones. Studies show that calcium absorption improves when taken with vitamin D. Other studies show that vitamin D may help prevent bone fractures later in life.

Varieties and uses

- **Snacks:** There are many Greek yogurt varieties depending on the country and area in which you live. In most Mediterranean areas, the yogurt is especially thick and savory and not used in a sweet context. In Mexico and North America, Greek yogurt is mostly sold as a sweet snack with the addition of fruits and various flavors.

- **Sauces:** Perhaps the most notable use of Greek yogurt is in *tzatziki*, a Greek sauce made with strained yogurt, cucumber, garlic, oil, vinegar and dill or mint. Tzatziki is used as a condiment for fried foods and sandwiches, such as gyros. However, Greek yogurt can be used to make all sorts of sauces. Since it has already been strained, it’s less likely to curdle when heated. Greek yogurt can add delicious tanginess to beef and lamb sauces.

- **Substitutions:** Greek yogurt is an ideal substitute for sour cream, cream cheese and butter. It can add creaminess and body to all sorts of dips, baked goods and fillings. While the yogurt has already been strained, it can be strained again for an even thicker consistency.
**Serving size**
1 (6-oz.) serving of Greek yogurt contains 100 calories, 0 grams fat, 18 grams protein and 20% of the daily calcium recommendation.

*Contributions to this article were made by Lauren Johnson.*

**RECIPE**

**PASTA CARBONARA**

Yield: 6 servings

**Ingredients:**
- 1 t. olive oil
- 4 oz. thinly-sliced prosciutto, diced
- 2 red bell peppers, sliced
- 2 garlic cloves, minced
- 1 t. red pepper flakes
- 1 ½ cups plain Greek yogurt
- 2 whole eggs
- ½ cup freshly grated Parmesan cheese
- ½ t. salt
- ½ t. black pepper
- 1 lb. dry spaghetti
- 1 cup frozen sweet peas
- ¼ cup freshly chopped parsley

**Method:**
In medium nonstick skillet, heat oil over medium heat. Add prosciutto and bell peppers. Cook, stirring often until heated through, about 2 minutes. Add garlic and red pepper flakes. Cook 30 seconds, stirring. Remove from heat; set aside. In large bowl, whisk together yogurt, eggs, Parmesan cheese, salt and pepper. Cook pasta in boiling water for 6 minutes, stirring often. Add peas to boiling water. Cook until pasta is tender but firm, about 4 additional minutes. Drain, reserving 1 cup pasta water. Put pasta directly in bowl with yogurt mixture; add reserved pasta water. Add prosciutto mixture. Toss to coat well. Serve immediately. Garnish with chopped parsley.

**Nutrition Information**

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*This recipe was created and tested by Clemson University’s Culinary Nutrition Undergraduate Student Research Group.*