

The lowdown on low-fat milk (It's all good)

December 14 2018, by Len Canter, Healthday Reporter



(HealthDay)—Calcium is best known as a building block of strong bones, and studies show that getting it from the source—milk—is more effective than supplements.

Nutritionists also are learning that it has another important role that's especially beneficial for dieters. Research has found that [calcium](#) can help suppress appetite and even lower your intake at the next meal, as well as help you retain muscle mass while losing fat.

While other research has found that [whole milk](#) has [health benefits](#) after all, if you're trying to cut calories to lose weight, reach for low-fat and non-fat [milk](#).

There are many ways besides drinking a glass of milk to get this rich store of calcium into your diet. Try using low-fat milk instead of water when making hot cereals such as oatmeal. Add low-fat milk to soups, vegetable purees and casseroles to make them creamy and flavorful without actual cream.

Mix up your own chocolate milk by vigorously stirring unsweetened cocoa powder, sugar substitute and a dash of cayenne for spiciness into non-fat milk. Microwave for 30 seconds for hot chocolate.

Need an afternoon pick-me-up? Have a non-fat hot or iced latte. For a nightcap, add a dash of vanilla and cinnamon to hot non-fat milk for a silky alternative to herbal tea.

Of course, milk makes a great base for many smoothie recipes. Add in banana slices, fresh or frozen berries and a few ice cubes, and you've got a thick and creamy treat.

And for a fast snack with crunch any time, fill a small bowl with milk and a cold whole grain cereal.

More information: Find out more about the benefits of [milk](#) at the U.S. Department of Agriculture's ChooseMyPlate.gov.

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