

It's Greek (yogurt) to me! ^[1]

Alice,

Last week I purchased Greek yogurt from the grocery store. I have heard that Greek yogurt is healthier than regular yogurt, but don't have anything to base that off of. Is this true?

Thanks,

It's Greek to me

Answer

Dear It's Greek to me,

Greek yogurt seems to be taking up more space on the grocery store shelves and making all the top healthy food lists lately. However, skepticism might prove helpful when pondering any food fad, including the buzz around Greek yogurt. While yogurt is generally considered a healthy food and may be part of a healthful diet, Greek yogurt does have some benefits over other varieties of yogurt.

Greek yogurt differs from regular yogurt in that liquid whey is strained out of the yogurt, resulting in a tangier taste and a richer, creamier texture. But Greek yogurt isn't too unlike regular yogurt, especially since both products begin with milk. However, they're processed differently; Greek yogurt is strained three times whereas regular yogurt is only strained twice. In fact, Greek yogurt may be made from regular yogurt — all that's involved is placing regular yogurt on a cheesecloth and letting some of the liquid whey drain out into a container below it. Greek yogurt has a similar nutritional profile to regular yogurt — it's a good source of:

- Protein
- Calcium
- Phosphorus
- Riboflavin (vitamin B2)
- Thiamin (vitamin B1)
- Vitamin B12
- Folate

- Niacin
- Magnesium
- Zinc

Many yogurts contain live bacterial cultures (also called probiotics) that help to encourage the growth of “good” bacteria in the stomach, similar to other fermented foods such as kimchi or kefir. Any type of yogurt that contains probiotics is associated with a number of potential health benefits, such as aiding digestion, having antidiarrheal properties, combatting carcinogens, regulating gut environment, alleviating irritable bowel syndrome, and boosting the immune response. In fact, since yogurt is made by combining milk with bacteria that turn the sugar in milk (lactose) into lactic acid. Those who are lactose intolerant [2] may find that their stomachs may be able to process dairy-based yogurts.

A difference Greek yogurt has from regular yogurt stems from the fact that Greek yogurt has a higher protein and lower carbohydrate content than regular yogurt. The process of making Greek yogurt allows some of the sugars in the yogurt to be strained into the whey-containing liquid. In fact, Greek yogurt has almost *twice* the protein, half of the sodium [3], and half of the carbs [4] of regular yogurt. However, if a lower sugar content is the appeal of Greek yogurt for you, consider checking the label on what you bought — some varieties have added sweeteners, resulting in higher sugar levels. In addition, flavored yogurts and those with fruit on the bottom of the cup (both in the regular and Greek varieties) may have more sugar [5] due to the additives.

The consumption of high protein snacks (such as Greek yogurt) has been linked to reduced appetite, increased feelings of fullness, and less frequent and heavy meals, when compared to not snacking and to consuming regular varieties of yogurt. While many choose to eat Greek yogurt as a snack, it has countless other uses, especially as a replacement for other products. You could try Greek yogurt as a low-fat substitute for sour cream, in cooking, or as a salad dressing. Try swapping it for mayonnaise on a sandwich or in a dish such as egg salad. Mixed with seasonings such as garlic or dill, it may be a unique dip for veggies. Throw some fruit and granola on it for a breakfast alternative to cereal. However you decide to eat your Greek yogurt, you'll be packing a protein punch.

If the taste and texture appeal to you, then consider buying Greek yogurt again; however, there are other varieties of yogurt that you may be interested in checking out as well:

- **Animal-based yogurt** is made from the milk of animals (such as cows, goats, sheep, camels, and buffalo). Greek yogurt is usually a variety of animal-based yogurt.
- **Plant-based yogurt** (or non-dairy yogurt) is made from soy, coconut, nuts, rice, or other plant foods. However, these yogurts may not have live bacteria, since not all plant-based yogurts undergo fermentation. They also tend to be lower in protein, calcium, and other nutrients, when compared to animal-based yogurts.
- **Bulgarian yogurt** (also known as *lactobacillus bulgaricus*) is unstrained, and therefore retains all of the calcium and additional nutrients from the milk that's used to make it. It has a tart flavor along with a creamy texture.
- **Icelandic yogurt** (also called skyr) is strained to an even greater degree than Greek yogurt, so it's thick and glossy. It's yogurt-like since it's a cultured milk product, but the texture is closer to cheese. Skyr is high in protein and traditionally made with skim and low

fat milk.

- **French yogurt** is unstrained like Bulgarian yogurt, but is instead made from whole milk. It has a smooth and creamy texture.
- **Australian yogurt** is unstrained yogurt with a dessert-like quality and a rich, velvety texture.

Here's to an increased understanding of the food fads found on the shelves!

Alice!

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