

Orange District, CDA



Posted on **June 6, 2012** by **Orange District, CDA**



Cheese has gotten a bad rap! Yes, it has saturated fat, cholesterol and sodium. But, it also has protein, calcium, Vitamin D, riboflavin, Vitamin B12, potassium and phosphorus. Now, I'm not giving a green light to cheese-based entrees like pizza, macaroni and cheese, and lasagna. They are just way too much cheese for heart health and weight management considerations. Used sparingly for flavor, natural cheese is a wonderful addition to wholesome foods.

Here's my guide to including a moderate amount of cheese into a healthful diet. **Limit intake to an ounce a day of "the good stuff", which refers to taste and nutrition**, not necessarily price. Reduced fat cheeses are okay but usually contain binders to replace texture, not to mention additional sodium for flavor. *As a Registered Dietitian, I'm sold on Cabot's 50% varieties.* I don't typically recommend nonfat cheeses since they really have artificial ingredients.

Dairy Case: **String cheese** (part-skim mozzarella) is suitable for a ready snack addition, children, or on-the-go. Individually wrapped at an ounce or so, it's perfect for either gym bag or backpack. **Nonfat cottage**

cheese is one fat-free variety that I do recommend! Despite its sodium content and added gums (less than 2%), its versatility can't be beat — at breakfast, pair ¼ Cup with fruit; at dinner, top a small baked potato with it and a spoonful of salsa.

Hard Cheeses: Gourmet and artisan cheeses can really pack a tasteful punch. With their sharp flavors, these drier cheeses are great for grating as a topping. **Parmesan, Pecorino Romano** and **Asiago** are among the lower fat choices.¹ **Gouda** is semi-hard and a better protein and calcium source than most other cheeses.¹

Semi-Soft Cheeses: These are suitable for melting, as a slice within a grilled sandwich or atop an omelet. **Port-Salut** (with the orange crust) and **Monterey Jack** are naturally lower in sodium.¹ For individually wrapped cheese, Laughing Cow's **Mini Babybel Light** is a convenient pick when heading out the door.

Crumbly Cheeses: These have great visual appeal atop greens, steaks, and fruit dishes. The addition of cheese may actually encourage youngsters to eat more fruit and vegetables! Of these, **Feta** has the least fat but most sodium, **Goat cheese** has the least sodium but is creamier and the mildest, and **Gorgonzola** falls in the middle nutritionally. About 3 Tbsp for an ounce serving.

I cannot pass on mentioning my favorite simple dessert: cut a fresh pear into thin slices, add 1-2 Tbsp Gorgonzola, 1-2 Tbsp chopped walnuts, drizzle with honey and enjoy. Bon Appétit!

Written By: Debbie Martin-James, RD

¹ *Cheese & Nutrition* brochure, ©2011 Innovation Center for U.S. Dairy® and National Dairy Council®

Click [here](#) for online version.