**Day 10**

**Title: Delightful Dairy**

Dairy products, such as milk, yogurt, and cheese, provide important vitamins and minerals that contribute to good health. Dairy products naturally contain protein, calcium, and potassium. Most milk sold in the United States has vitamin D added. When vitamin D and calcium are consumed together, your body absorbs more calcium that it normally would.

**How many servings of dairy should I get each day?**

If you eat dairy, aim for 3 servings each day.

**What counts as a serving of dairy?**

One serving of dairy is 1 cup of milk or yogurt or 1.5 ounces of cheese. 1.5 ounces is similar in size to six dice. Or, for comparison to existing foods, single-serve string cheese is usually 1 ounce of cheese, or ⅔ a serving of dairy.

**Are there any types of dairy I should avoid?**

Dairy is a great source of calcium, but it naturally has a lot of calories and fat, especially saturated fat. Low-fat and fat-free dairy products have had most or all of the fat removed. What’s left is lower in calories but still high in calcium and vitamins. Choose low-fat or fat-free dairy over whole fat.

Flavored milk products, such as chocolate milk and dessert-like yogurts, contain additional sugar and calories, but no extra nutritional value. If you’re wondering whether or not a type of yogurt or milk product has extra sugar, just read the food label. All dairy products will have some amount of sugar, since dairy naturally contains lactose, a type of sugar. What you don’t want is added sugars, which are listed in the ingredients section. Look for words like cane sugar, corn syrup, high-fructose corn syrup, honey, crystallized sugar, and agave. These tell you sugar has been added to your food. Yogurt with added fruit may seem like a healthy option, but still check the label. Some brands and varieties add some fruit and a lot of sugar. Know what you’re getting!

Also, don’t use your need for dairy to justify eating foods that are unhealthy for you. Ice cream, puddings, and other dairy-based desserts are full of fat, calories, and sugar. Save them for a special occasion, not for checking off your dairy requirements.

**What if I can’t or don’t eat dairy?**

If you can’t or don’t eat dairy, you can still get the calcium and vitamin D you need through other foods. One of the easiest ways is by drinking orange juice with added calcium. Or, try calcium-enriched soymilk or almond milk. Or try lactose-free milk and cheeses. Other non-dairy foods that are high in calcium include almonds, tofu, beans, breads made with enriched wheat flour, leafy greens like collard greens, turnip greens, mustard greens, and spinach.

You can also get vitamin D from other non-dairy foods. Fatty fish are the best natural sources of vitamin D. These include salmon, tuna, and mackerel.

**A final word**

Dairy products are good sources of calcium and potassium, which are important nutrients. Dairy products are also high in saturated fat and calories, which are things we’d like to keep in check. Not everybody can eat dairy products, thanks to lactose intolerance or allergies to certain proteins. And some choose not to eat it as part of their diet. If you do eat dairy products, choose low-fat or nonfat options. Save full-fat version and dessert-like options for rare occasions. Dairy products can be a healthy part of your balanced diet, but they’re also not essential. If you can’t or don’t eat dairy products, though, be aware of getting plenty of calcium, potassium, and vitamin D from other foods or supplements.

**Sources:**

USDA Center for Nutrition Policy and Promotion. (2015, July 22). All about the Dairy Group. Retrieved August 26, 2015, from <http://www.choosemyplate.gov/dairy>