



Yogurt scores highly as a nutrition-rich food

Yogurt is packed full of healthy nutrients and consistently scores highly on nutrition rating scales, scientists are finding. Not only is it high in beneficial calcium and protein, but it can also be low in fat and very reasonable in calories.

Several 'tools' have been developed to evaluate nutrient-density of foods, with the aim of helping people make more informed decisions about the foods they're buying, said US nutritionist Dr Victor Fulgoni, III. These nutrient density scoring systems use nutrient content – including both nutrients to encourage and nutrients that should be moderated.

Dr Fulgoni and his colleagues have developed one such scoring system, the Nutrient Rich Foods (NRF) 9.3 index, which ranks different foods according to their nutritional value. It uses a formula to measure the 'nutrient density' of foods based on the content of 9 nutrients to encourage (calcium, protein, fibre, iron, magnesium, riboflavin and vitamins A, C and E) and 3 nutrients to limit (saturated fat, added sugars and sodium) per 100 calories in a given food or beverage.

Healthy, nutrient-dense foods receive high NRF scores while foods that provide calories but few nutrients have a low score. The nutrient density concept distinguishes foods with empty calories (foods with calories but poor in beneficial nutrients) from foods with useful calories (rich in beneficial nutrients).

Aiding healthy choices

With this tool, foods such as sweets containing largely sugars have negative scores while healthy foods such as fruit and vegetables score highly. Within dairy products, ice cream scores poorly, but most yogurts have been shown to be nutrient-dense.





According to Dr Fulgoni, yogurts are nutrient-rich on this scale, although yogurts with low-calorie sweeteners and Greek yogurt score highest, while yogurts with added sugar have a slightly lower score.

Better diet based on nutrition scores

A simplified version of the NRF index which scores foods from 1 to 5 was pilot-tested on 190 consumers over several weeks. Results showed that consumers found it easy to use and they were able to improve the quality of their diet when provided with this information said DrFulgoni.

Similar beneficial findings for yogurt have come from another food scale, the Overall Nutritional Quality Index (ONQI), which can be used as a food labeling system to rank foods according to their nutritional quality – in this case, based on 30 nutrients.

‘Both tools are reasonable ways to measure nutrient density and both show that yogurt is a good food which contributes a significant number of nutrients,’ Dr. Fulgoni explained.

With yogurt, you can get more nutrients per calorie than you might for other foods, he concluded.

Dr. Fulgoni is Senior Vice President of Nutrition Impact, a consulting firm based in Michigan, USA, which helps food companies develop and communicate science-based claims about their products and services.

