

# Healthy Meal Options, Including Dairy Foods, Support School Success

by Maggie Cimarolli  
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School bells will be ringing soon. Along with the return to school comes a shift in daily routines, including mealtimes and mealtime options. Whether children and adolescents enjoy school-prepared breakfast and lunch, or eat breakfast at home and bring a lunch,

well-balanced meals will set them up for success in school. Parents may find themselves overwhelmed by planning meals for the busy school year, but by simply adding a dairy food to each meal, parents can easily increase a meal's nutrition.

“Parents may find themselves scrambling for meal ideas as the new school-year routine gets under way,” said Maggie Cimarolli, a registered dietitian and nutrition educator with the St. Louis District Dairy Council. “Dairy foods are an excellent choice to incorporate into meals as they provide protein, carbohydrates and healthy fats, plus provide vitamins and minerals. In addition, many dairy foods are extremely portable, such as yogurt and string cheese, making them perfect for meals on the go. Dairy options can also greatly simplify breakfast, which can be a hard meal to pull together on hectic mornings.”

The federal Dietary Guidelines for Americans recommend three servings of low-fat or fat-free dairy per day as part of a healthy eating pattern. Milk, in particular, adds to the quality of meals as it delivers 13 essential nutrients, including calcium, potassium, vitamin D and protein, in every 8-ounce serving. Calcium, potassium and vitamin D are nutrients of concern as most Americans — adults and children alike — do not consume enough of these nutrients on a daily basis. One 8-ounce glass of milk provides one-third of the recommended daily allowance of calcium, which helps support bone development.

“Encouraging students to buy milk with their school breakfast or lunch is an easy way to add a nutrient-rich food to a meal,” Cimarolli said. “Milk also quenches thirst and can give students a boost in energy for afternoon activities. In addition, milk contains 8 grams of protein, which can help keep students full longer.”

## **SLDDC Supports Schools**

For this school year, SLDDC is supporting schools and families in two ways to ensure students are fueled for their busy days.

Approximately 500 school nurses in eastern Missouri and southern and central Illinois received a new back-to-school nutrition pamphlet from the SLDDC. This pamphlet provides families with quick, easy and nutritious options for breakfast, lunch and snacks. The SLDDC is encouraging the nurses to share the resource with parents at upcoming back-to-school events.

To help increase dairy consumption in the schools, the SLDDC also awarded 29 Dollars for Dairy grants to 18 Missouri and 11 Illinois schools. The grants help schools afford new equipment to prepare or serve dairy foods for students. The SLDDC has offered this grant program since 2012. Schools may request up to \$2,000 per grant application.

“This valuable grant program continues to backstop public and private school cafeterias in their efforts to provide the best meals possible for the students,” Cimarolli said. “In the past, the grants have been used to purchase panini makers, smoothie makers, coolers and breakfast carts to serve dairy breakfast options. We are always excited to learn about the proposed innovative ideas.”

## **About the St. Louis District Dairy Council**

The St. Louis District Dairy Council (SLDDC) is a nonprofit nutrition education organization funded by local dairy farmers. Since 1932, SLDDC has served 131 counties in central/southern Illinois and eastern Missouri as the go-to educational resource and advocate for the role of dairy foods as part of a healthful diet. As The Nutrition Education People, we are proud to spread knowledge to local communities, bridging the gap between local dairy farmers and consumers. The staff is comprised of professionals with experience in nutrition, food service management, education and communications, and we take pride in delivering engaging programs throughout the communities we serve.

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## **Cottage Cheese Pancakes**

Versatile cottage cheese can be eaten alone or easily incorporated into other foods. Cottage cheese is a great way to boost the amount of protein and calcium in a meal. The addition of cottage cheese to this recipe results in 12 g of protein per serving! Start off the first day of school with these fluffy pancakes to fuel your family.

**Prep Time:** 10 minutes

**Yield:** 5 (2 pancakes)

### **Ingredients:**

1 cup 2% cottage cheese

2 eggs

1 ½ tsp. vanilla extract

2 Tbsp. sugar

1 Tbsp. baking powder

1 cup flour

½ cup milk

¼ cup canola oil

**Directions:**

1. In a blender, add all ingredients in the following order: cottage cheese, eggs, canola oil, milk, vanilla extract, sugar, baking powder and flour. Blend the ingredients until the batter is smooth.
2. Coat skillet with cooking spray or melt butter on skillet as it preheats. Once skillet is preheated, add batter to pan (1/3 cup per pancake). Once batter starts to bubble, flip the pancakes and cook until both sides are golden brown.
3. Serve with maple syrup, jam, peanut butter or fresh fruit.
4. Store leftovers in refrigerator and use within 3 days. The pancakes reheat well.

Source: Adapted from Drozhzhin, N. (2020, March 22). Cottage Cheese Pancakes. Momsdish.com. Retrieved June 22, 2023, from <https://momsdish.com/recipe/177/cottage-cheese-pancakes>