

# Yogurt and Sugar

Yogurt has been around for thousands of years, at least since 6000 BC. The word yogurt is believed to come from the Turkish word “yog<sup>u</sup>rmak,” which means to thicken, coagulate, or curdle. Most yogurt today is made from cow’s milk fermented with *Lactobacillus bulgaricus* and *Streptococcus thermophilus* bacteria, the live and active cultures found in many types of yogurt.



The first lactic acid bacteria was identified in 1905, and researchers believed that the lactobacilli in yogurt were associated with a long and healthy life. This made yogurt popular as a health food. Today, yogurt retains its place in the market as a healthy food, but the high added sugar content of most types of yogurt actually puts them in the category of dessert rather than health food. According to the American Heart Association, flavored and sweetened yogurt is one of the top sources of added sugars in the American diet.

It’s often difficult to find plain yogurt hidden among the wide variety of flavors available. Yoplait alone has 14 different dessert flavors (their description) including Boston Crème Pie, Lemon Meringue, and Strawberry Cheesecake. The top-selling yogurt flavors in 2014 in the US are strawberry (5.79%) and blueberry (4.04%), followed by vanilla, peach, plain, raspberry, honey, etc. The perceived health benefits of certain flavors (such as pomegranate or acai berry) also help drive yogurt flavor trends. However, the perception of yogurt as a healthy food doesn’t match the reality that flavored yogurt is sweetened with added sugar in various forms, including cane sugar, evaporated cane juice, sugar, honey, and brown sugar.

These flavorings come at a cost of added sugar, ranging between 4 grams (8 g total sugar content) in Siggis mixed berry Greek yogurt to 23 grams (29g total sugar content) in Fage split cup honey Greek yogurt. A teaspoon of table sugar is equivalent to 4 grams of sugar; this means that the Fage honey Greek yogurt contains almost 6 added teaspoons of sugar.

As much as we want to believe that the fruit in yogurt counts toward our daily fruit serving, thanks all the sugar that gets added to it, that kind of fruit is much closer to jam. For example, Dannon Fruit on the Bottom Blueberry yogurt has 12 grams of added sugar (24g total sugar content) in a single container.

If you want to keep yogurt as part of your diet without consuming way too much added sugar, here’s what I recommend: enjoy plain yogurt and add your own flavoring. That way, you control how much sugar you add. Consider mixing in fresh fruit, fruit canned in its own juice, unsweetened applesauce, or frozen fruit without added sugar. You could also flavor it with vanilla, cinnamon and/or nutmeg.

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