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Jennifer Sygo: Getting to the bottom of the best yogourt

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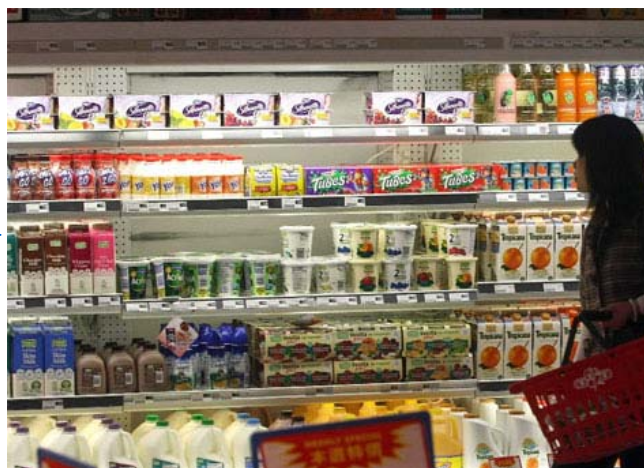
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By Jennifer Sygo, National Post

In the battle of the bulge, does it matter what type of yogourt you prefer? According to a new study in the April edition of the *American Journal of Clinical Nutrition*, it's not so much the type of yogourt that matters to your waistline, but rather the way you consume it.

YOGOURT: BY SPOON OR BY STRAW?

In the study, published by Dutch researchers, 105 healthy participants were given yogourt in three different forms: semi-solid with a spoon, liquid with a spoon and liquid yogourt with a straw. Yes, that's right, drinkable yogourt. After 10 breakfasts in which they were told to eat as much yogourt as they liked, participants consumed the same amount of liquid and semi-solid yogourt, as long as they were both eaten with a spoon. As for the yogourt slurped through a straw? Those participants consumed an average of an extra 100 grams of yogourt per meal — that's the equivalent of one of those individual servings that come in most multi-packs (most participants ate about 500 grams of yogourt per meal).

What does this mean? The main difference between the spoon-fed yogourt eaters and the straw-fed group was the speed at which they consumed their meal: While both spoon-fed groups averaged about 105 grams of yogourt per minute (the equivalent of about one small container per minute), the drinking group chugged roughly 25% more yogourt in the same amount of time. The take-home message? Not only is eating too fast hazardous to



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your pant size, but drinking your calories, especially through a straw, is an easy way to trick your brain into eating more than it needs. While you might not normally reach for a straw when you have your morning yogurt, keep it in mind the next time you order a pop, smoothie or even a protein shake — if the container is big enough to double as a hot tub when you're done with it, then there's a good chance you'll gulp more food than you need before you feel full.

FIBRE AND YOGURT: DOES IT HELP?

What else makes yogurt more filling (or less)? Lately, research has focused on adding soluble fibre, most commonly in the form of inulin (a type of fibre derived from various foods, including chicory root), and the results have been promising: Several studies have shown that inulin-fortified yogurt can be more filling than traditional yogurts.

Somewhat controversial in nutrition circles, inulin has the upside of being a prebiotic, which means it feeds the healthy bacteria in your intestines. The downside? It doesn't seem to possess the same cholesterol-lowering effects as other soluble fibre-rich foods (in a nutshell, inulin is a source of soluble fibre that is non-viscous, whereas the fibre in oatmeal and ground flaxseed is both soluble and viscous, which seems to be critical for cholesterol control).

The other issue with inulin is that it can cause digestive issues — read: gas — especially when one isn't accustomed to eating it.

YOGURT AND FAT: DOES IT MATTER?

What about the fat content of the yogurt? The debate between fat-free, low-fat and full-fat yogurts is one of those little things that can seem very big in life, especially when two people in the same household go to war each week in the dairy cooler at the grocery store. While some argue extra fat — and the calories that come with it — is worth it, both in terms of flavour and satiety — others reason that a lower-fat or fat-free yogurt typically contains between 20 and 40 fewer calories per 100 grams than a comparable higher-fat yogurt.

While there is a fair bit of research on the effect of dietary fats on appetite, there has been relatively little study on the effect the fat content in yogurt has on fullness and caloric intake. In one older study, researchers from the University at Buffalo found that women given a higher-fat yogurt at breakfast did eat less yogurt, but they consumed more calories (in other words, they didn't reduce their intake enough to compensate for the extra calories). And if you're wondering about the carbohydrate content of the yogurt (there is a fair bit of sugar in most flavoured yogurts), it didn't have an effect on the amount of calories consumed, at least not in this particular study.

THE BOTTOM LINE

If you're looking for the most filling yogurt that is going to keep you from blowing your caloric budget, it seems your best bet is to choose a lower-fat yogurt with a spoon. Adding inulin is up to you (it's increasingly popular among food manufacturers), but watch out for those uncomfortable side effects.

• Jennifer Sygo is a dietitian in private practice at Cleveland Clinic Canada (clevelandclinic.ca), which offers executive physicals, prevention and wellness counselling and personal health care management in Toronto.
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[Want to avoid a duel in the dairy case? First, take a step back from the yogurt delivered through a straw. Photo by Ted Rhodes / Canwest file photo]

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