



You don't know beans about cottage cheese

You know it's next to the garbanzos at the salad bar. Did you know this versatile dairy food will add taste, texture, flavor and protein to many other foods?

When was the last time you had a cup of cottage cheese? Unless you are one of the few regular cottage cheese eaters, I imagine that most of you are thinking you served yourself a spoonful or two at some lunch or dinner salad bar. And my guess is if it was good quality cottage cheese, you may have thought that was pretty good and perhaps wondered why you don't consume it more often.

According to the Institute of Medicine we should be getting 10% to 35% of our total calories from protein, or about 50 to 175 grams of protein for most of us who eat approximately 2,000 calories a day. But there is increasing scientific evidence that consuming protein at levels above the minimum recommended dietary allowance would be beneficial for optimal health and nutrition (i.e., improved muscle function and treatment of obesity, type 2 diabetes, metabolic syndrome, heart disease and sarcopenia).

New studies suggest we consume 20 to 30 grams of protein at each meal for optimal health and wellness. In a recent study, consuming twice the recommended dietary allowance of protein during dieting and exercise prevented muscle loss — particularly noteworthy for the baby boomers looking to keep their active lifestyles post-50.

If I choose a Burger King's Whopper with cheese I will get about 29 grams of protein. But along with that protein I will get 42 grams fat, a "whopping" 1,380 milligrams of sodium (over 50% of the RDA of sodium for adults) and 710 calories (and that is without the fries). Savvy, health-oriented consumers looking for simple alternatives have fueled popularity of other high-protein foods like yogurts (i.e. Greek yogurts). However, many (including me) seek more variety in our protein foods. We are seeking foods that deliver protein in a savory food rather than sweet fruit flavored yogurts. An 8-ounce serving of meaty-textured low-fat cottage cheese packs the same amount of protein as the Whopper

in a 180-calorie package containing 720 milligrams of sodium and only 5 grams of fat.

Label the package

But my guess is most consumers never knew (or have forgotten) that cottage cheese is a high-protein food. I visited a major supermarket and saw four brands of cottage cheese available in several sizes. However not a single brand brought attention to the protein content of this product.

Cottage cheese marketers: take a look at the labels on the front of the Greek yogurt containers and note their efforts to communicate protein content. While you are at it, look at the variety of flavors of Greek yogurts, package sizes and other variants compared to the number of product offerings of cottage cheese. Who's ready for green tea, chipotle, peanut butter swirl or tangy barbecue?

Cottage cheese makers: you have been naturally "straining" a fermented skim milk to concentrate milk protein into a meaty delicious high-protein food for consumers since the inception of this product. So get your share of the high-protein food market by providing this healthy food in the varieties consumers want! Carpe diem!

Cottage cheese is great as is or with savory flavors, a wide array of fruits and other condiments. Consumers and food manufacturers need to be educated on the versatility of cottage cheese as a food ingredient that will add taste, texture, flavor and healthy protein to many foods. It can be blended into a creamy low-fat dip, used in casseroles, as a stuffing for blintzes, as a tasty spread on crackers, in fruit smoothies and to add a high-quality protein to many other of your favorite foods.

Consider functional ingredients

What else can fuel renewed interest in cottage cheese? Prebiotics, probiotics, minerals, more dairy proteins and other good-for-you ingredients can be incorporated into the cottage cheese dressing to give this product another



■ Umpqua Dairy, Roseburg, Ore., notes its award on the package of its cottage cheese. The author suggests that cottage cheese makers promote the protein content on containers to appeal to shoppers looking for high-protein foods.

health boost. Is there an equivalent convenient on-the-go package to the tubes of yogurt for the cottage cheese consumer? Can smarter culture technology or other technologies be used in cottage cheese manufacturing to make less-acidic-tasting products to appeal to consumer tastes as was done for yogurt?

While consumers will always enjoy a dollop of cottage cheese from the salad bar, insuring we deliver and communicate the nutrition, great eating quality and food ingredient versatility of cottage cheese, and respond to consumers' desire for product variety in a convenient package will result in renewed interest in a dairy product which has all but been forgotten over the last quarter century. ■

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