Dairy foods pack a powerhouse of protein, vitamins, and minerals. They’re among the healthiest foods a person can eat. Dairy foods include milk and foods made from milk. Cheese, yogurt, and milk are the most nutritious foods in this group.

Experts advise eating three servings of dairy foods each day. Luckily, there are many yummy dairy foods. This means you have lots of choices! For example, more than 300 types of cheese are made in the United States. Yogurt also comes in a variety of types and flavors. So does milk and ice cream. There are low-fat and fat-free varieties of dairy foods, too.

Dairy foods are loaded with nine important nutrients that every body needs. Five of these are calcium, magnesium, potassium, protein, and vitamin D. These nutrients work together to keep your bones and teeth strong. They also help your muscles, blood, and nervous system stay healthy. Studies show that people who eat lots of dairy products tend to eat healthier.

**Calcium Is King!**

Calcium is the number one bone-building nutrient in dairy foods. Right now your bones are growing fast. The more dairy foods you eat, the better! In fact, kids and teens who load up on dairy tend to have healthier bones as adults. Adults who do not get enough calcium early in life can end up with bones that break easily. You don’t want this to happen!

But what if dairy foods upset your stomach? This could mean you are lactose intolerant. This means your body can’t digest lactose, the natural sugar found in milk. The good news is naturally aged hard cheeses like cheddar do not contain lactose. Also, lactose-free milk and yogurt are sold in grocery stores. This means you can still enjoy three servings of dairy a day.

**The Exercise Connection**

Growing strong bones and muscles takes more than good food. You must stay active too. Each day you need at least 60 minutes of exercise. This doesn’t mean you have to do push-ups. Have some fun! Dance, shoot hoops, skip rope, or take your dog for a walk. Play catch with a friend or kick a soccer ball around. The best activities are ones that stretch and exercise your entire body.

**Snacking for Health**

Snacking on dairy foods between meals is an easy way to get in your three servings a day. You can drink a glass of milk, eat a slice of your favorite cheese, or enjoy a serving of yummy yogurt. Here’s even more good news! People who eat plenty of dairy products tend to weigh less than people who do not. So snack away!

Write the answers.

1. What are the three most nutritious dairy foods?

2. What is the most important bone-building nutrient in dairy products?

3. Why is it important for kids and teens to get plenty of dairy?


5. How many daily servings of dairy and how many minutes of daily exercise are suggested for good health?
Answer Key
“Why Is Dairy Important?”
Grade 4 (RI.4.10)

1. cheese, yogurt, and milk
2. calcium
3. Their bones are less likely to break when they are adults.
4. yes; Explanations will vary.
5. 3 servings of dairy and 60 minutes of exercise every day

Bonus: calcium, magnesium, potassium, protein, vitamin D