



THE PLAIN DEALER

Adding fruit to yogurt won't counter culture

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Years ago, a microbiologist I know said he had read a report arguing that the natural acidity in fruit added to yogurt possibly destroys these cultured products' healthful bacteria. Frankly, we love plain yogurt, but it's obviously easier to get young children to eat the fruit-added varieties. Could you produce some objective research findings?

-- DVR, Lakewood Does added fruit kill the cultures in yogurt? Gee, I hope not! I've been adding fruit to yogurt since college, when I made my own.

Although I could find no research regarding your specific question, the short answer is no. If live cultures can navigate the hyperacidic environment of the stomach, they are unlikely to be troubled by the acidity of fruit.

Besides, yogurt is by its nature an acidic product. Milk becomes yogurt when bacteria metabolize some of its natural sugar (lactose) into lactic acid. The National Yogurt Association has proposed a standard of identity for yogurt that would require a pH of 4.6 or lower (which is acidic, for the nonchemists.)

Yogurt in the United States is made with two specific cultures: *Lactobacillus bulgaricus* and *Streptococcus thermophilus*. Some manufacturers add more bacterial strains, including *L. acidophilus*, *L. casei*, *L. reuteri* and *Bifidobacterium bifidum*. These possibly beneficial cultures are called probiotics.

That said, it's important to know that not all yogurts on the market contain active cultures. Some yogurts are heat-treated after culturing to prolong shelf life. This kills the bacteria and might inactivate any lactase present.

If you want live cultures, it is important to buy yogurt made from milk that is pasteurized before it is cultured. Some yogurts carry the National Yogurt Association's Live and Active Cultures seal, certifying that these products contain significant amounts of active cultures (100 million per gram at the time of manufacture and at least 10 million at the end of shelf life). Because this labeling is voluntary, some yogurts might contain active cultures yet not carry the seal.

Some consumer tests have suggested that probiotics delivered in yogurt are more likely to come to you live than those freeze-dried and sold as supplements. Plus you receive the other nutritional benefits of yogurt: protein, calcium and riboflavin. Just be aware that many yogurt "products" including yogurt-covered pretzels and peanuts, candy, desserts and some frozen yogurts deliver little or no bacterial action.

What are the health benefits of yogurt with live cultures? There are myriad claims, including improved intestinal health, protection against ulcers, anti-cancer effects, enhanced immunity and prevention and treatment of vaginal yeast infections. While results of research into these issues have been mixed, there is growing evidence for the usefulness of yogurt and *Lactobacillus* in treating lactose intolerance, constipation and viral and antibiotic-associated diarrhea.

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