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Misner, Scottie, "G90-966 Choosing and Using Cheese" (1990). *Historical Materials from University of Nebraska-Lincoln Extension*. 806.

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Choosing and Using Cheese

This guide discusses kinds of cheese, food values found in cheese, uses for cheese, how to cook with and buy cheese, and the care and storage of cheese. A cheese lover's guide and recipe are included.

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Cheese has been an important food for centuries and is still widely used in various parts of the world. Many varieties have been developed, each with its own special flavor. The wide range in price, excellent food value and good keeping quality make it easy to use cheese often in planning nutritious meals.

Kinds of Cheese

All cheese is made from milk. Most is made from cow's milk, but some varieties are made from the milk of sheep or goats. Cheese making starts with the coagulation of the milk protein to form the curd. This is then separated from the liquid whey by heating, stirring and pressing. Next it is salted and cured or ripened. The specific method used gives a particular cheese its appearance, consistency, texture and flavor.

More than 2,000 varieties of cheese have been defined and classified by several methods. Methods of classification are:

Consistency -- soft to hard
Flavor -- mild to sharp
Fat Content -- low to moderate

Manufacturing Process -- distinctive cheese varieties

Natural and Process Cheeses

Cheeses may also be classified as natural or process cheese. The name indicates how the cheese was made.

Natural cheese is made from pasteurized whole milk to which bacteria, rennet and sometimes color are added. The curd is heated, stirred and pressed to remove excess moisture. It may or may not be aged. The longer the curing or aging period the sharper the flavor. The most popular natural cheese is Cheddar.

- **Process cheese** is made by blending new and aged lots of the same or different varieties of natural cheese. An emulsifier is added and the cheese is pasteurized to stop further curing. The process provides uniformity and keeping quality.

Process cheese is the cheese to use if you want uniform flavor, consistency and cooking quality. Because it contains an emulsifier, it will melt smoothly and quickly without becoming stringy. Among the flavors of process cheese are mild, medium and sharp American, American pimiento, Swiss, brick and Limburger.

- **Process cheese food** is a blend of natural cheeses to which non-fat dry milk or whey solids and water have been added. It is milder in flavor, softer in texture and contains somewhat less cheese than process cheese. Cheese food may be smoked, or have pimiento, fruit, vegetable or meat added for flavor. At least 51 percent of the finished product must be cheese.
- **Process cheese spread** is similar to cheese food except that an edible stabilizer and moisture are added. The soft consistency makes it easy to spread with a knife at room temperature.
- **Packaged grated cheese** is still another kind of cheese with good keeping qualities. Hard American and Italian cheeses are prepared this way. Grated cheese is convenient to use for sprinkling on foods such as spaghetti, salads and casserole dishes.
- **Cold-Pack cheese food** is made by blending cheese, water, milk, cream, whey, gums, and/or sweeteners without heat. It is usually lower in sodium than pasteurized cheese because sodium phosphate isn't added as an emulsifier.
- **Imitation Cheese** is not made according to FDA rules, but it is nutritionally equivalent to cheese.

It is usually made of casein, whey or other cheese by-products and usually contains a vegetable oil instead of milk fat. This cheese is low in cholesterol, but not in fat or calories.

Food Values

Since cheese is made from milk, it has many of the nutrients found in milk. Twenty to 30 percent of cheese is high quality protein. It is an excellent source of calcium and phosphorus, but only a fair source of riboflavin since most of this vitamin is pressed out with the whey. Cheddar or cream cheese made from whole milk is rich in fat and vitamin A value. Cottage cheese made from skim milk contains very little fat.

Cholesterol -- The relationship of cholesterol to saturated fat is a concern to many persons on a fat-restricted diet. Low fat cheeses range from 5 to 17 mg cholesterol per ounce while moderate fat cheeses contain 13 to 35 mg cholesterol.

Sodium -- Sodium levels vary according to flavor and process. Some products are now lower in sodium amounts and may be labeled -- "reduced sodium" or "low sodium." Reduced sodium products still have 450 to 700 mg per 1 1/2 ounces -- which is still high for persons on reduced sodium diets. The National Association of Sciences recommends 1,100 to 3,300 mg sodium in an entire day.

Cheese Uses

There is a cheese to suit every taste, mood and occasion. Almost all varieties can be served plain as appetizers or with other foods. Crackers spread with cheese may be served with soup or salad. Cheese sandwiches make good additions to the lunch or picnic box. A cheese tray arranged with several kinds of cheese and fresh fruit makes an interesting and unusual type of dessert. A piece of cheese goes well with apple pie. For easy slicing and better flavor, remove cheese from the refrigerator an hour before serving.

Cheese dishes are often used in place of meat, fish or poultry. Cheese fondue, souffle, Welsh rabbit, omelet and pizza are typical examples. Smaller amounts of cheese are used for flavor with potatoes, other vegetables, rice, macaroni, noodles, or spaghetti. Cheese may be added to sauces and dressings, grated as a garnish for soups or hot dishes, and made into desserts such as cheesecake.

Cooking with Cheese

Cooking should be done at a low temperature so the cheese does not become tough or stringy. Some cheeses blend more easily than others. Cream cheese combines very easily and is used in many main dishes and desserts. Process cheese or aged Cheddar give best results as an ingredient in a main dish. To speed up melting and blending of cheese, grate, slice or shave it thin before you heat it. Whenever possible, mix cheese with a sauce before adding it to other ingredients.

Buying Tips

Keep in mind the use for which the cheese is intended. Consistency and flavor should be considered if the cheese is to be served plain. If the cheese is to be used for cooking, it should be a variety that will melt easily. An important bit of information on the label of certain kinds of natural cheese indicates the age or degree of curing. Cheddar cheese, for example, may be labeled as "mild," "medium," or "sharp."

Keeping quality is another point to think about when buying cheese. The hard varieties and process cheeses keep best. The size of the package or the quantity to buy at one time should also be considered. Larger amounts may be cheaper but may not be a bargain unless the cheese can be used within a reasonable time.

Care and Storage

Soft cheeses spoil quickly and must be refrigerated until used. Hard and semihard cheeses need to be stored at low temperatures. To prevent drying out, cheese should be carefully covered with a moist cloth, waxed paper or foil. Whenever possible, the original wrapper or cover should be left on the cheese. Grated cheese will dry out least when stored in a covered jar in the refrigerator.

Cheese tends to become dry and crumbly when frozen. Certain varieties such as brick, Cheddar, Edam,

Gouda, Muenster, Swiss, Provolone, Mozzarella and Camembert are sometimes frozen. These should be packaged in small pieces weighing a pound or less and used as soon after thawing as possible.

A CHEESE LOVER'S GUIDE

Low Fat Cheeses						
Variety	Serving size	Calories	Fat (g)	Calcium (mg)	Sodium (mg)	Serving Suggestions
American Flavor						
Pasteurized Process Light 'n Lively (Kraft)	1 oz	70	4	199	406	Use for sandwiches, salads
Bon Bell						
(Reduced Calorie) Cheddar	1 oz	60	4	209	--	Mild flavor, similar to Edam. Use for snacks, for dessert, with fruit
Cheddar						
Natural Cheddar Style, Heidi Ann	1 oz	83	5	200	176	Mild to sharp flavor. Use for snacks, sandwiches, casseroles, sauce, on pie
Cheese Food						
Sharp Cheddar May-Bud	1 oz	70	4	150	270	Use for snacks, sandwiches, casseroles, with fruit, for dessert.
Cheese Spread, Kraft Flavored Spreads						
Jalapeno	1 oz	65	5	47	357	Use for sandwiches, snacks
Pimiento	1 oz	66	5	45	335	
Colby Flavor						
Pasteurized Process Lite-line (Borden)	1 oz	50	2	200	171	Mild to mellow flavor. Use for salads, sandwiches, snacks.
Cottage Cheese						
Creamed*	4 oz (1/2 c)	117	5	68	457	Mild table cheese. Use for salads, dips, baking.
Low Fat, 2% Fat*	4 oz (1/2 Cup)	101	2	77	499	
Cream Cheese						
Light Philadelphia Brand	1 oz	60	5	31	84	Use for sandwich spreads, dips, salads, with bagels.
Farmers						
Natural May-						Clean, mild. Use for salads,

Bud	1 oz	90	2	150	--	snacks, cooking.
Monterey Jack						
Flavor Pasteurized Process Lite-line (Borden)	1 oz	50	2	200	--	Mild to mellow flavor, Use for salads, sandwiches, Mexican cooking.
Mozzarella						
Natural (Part Skim)*	1 oz	72	5	183	106	Mild flavor. Use for pizza, lasagna, grilled sandwiches.
Muenster Flavor						
Pasteurized Process - Lite-line (Borden)	1 oz	50	2	200	178	A semisoft cheese with a mild to mellow flavor. Use for snacks, sandwiches.
Ricotta						
Natural (Part Skim)*	1 oz	43	3	84	155	Semisweet flavor. Use for cooked dishes, salads, dips, fillings, desserts.
Natural (Whole Milk)*	1 oz	54	4	65	104	
Scamorze						
Natural (Part Skim) Jewel	1 oz	79	5	200	--	Mild flavor. Use for cooking Italian dishes.
String Cheese						
Natural Kraft (Part Skim)	1 oz	82	5	212	--	Mild flavor. Use for snacks.
Swiss Flavor						
Pasteurized Process - Light 'n Lively (Kraft)	1 oz	71	4	214	439	Mild, nutty, sweet flavor. Use for sandwiches, salads, fondue, casseroles.

Moderate Fat Cheeses						
<i>Variety</i>	<i>Serving size</i>	<i>Calories</i>	<i>Fat (g)</i>	<i>Calcium (mg)</i>	<i>Sodium (mg)</i>	<i>Serving Suggestions</i>
Baby Bel	1 oz	90	7	199	--	Creamy, mild flavor. Use for snacks, appetizers, salads.
BEL PAESE	1 oz	90	8	165	--	Sweet, mild table cheese. Use for snacks, desserts.
Blue*	1 oz	100	8	150	396	Sharp, distinctive flavor. Use for appetizers, salads, salad

						dressing, desserts.
Bon Bel	1 oz	100	8	182	--	Creamy, mild flavor. Use for snacks, appetizers, salads.
Brick*	1 oz	105	8	191	159	Pungent, sweet flavor. Use for sandwiches, snacks.
Brie*	1 oz	95	8	52	178	Distinctive flavor and aroma. Use for dessert, with fruit.
Camembert*	1 oz	85	7	110	239	Creamy, distinctive flavor. Use for dessert, with fruit.
Cheese Food						
Cheddar						Use for sandwiches, snacks.
Cracker Barrel Flavored (Kraft)	1 oz	93	7	159	176	Mild to sharp flavor. Use for appetizers, snacks.
Swiss*	1 oz.	92	7	205	440	Mild, sweet, nut-like flavor. Use for sandwiches, snacks, fondue.
Cheese Spreads						
Cheese Whiz (Kraft), All flavors	1 oz	77	6	147	--	Use for sandwiches, snacks, cooking.
Cracker Barrel Cheese, Log (Kraft)	1 oz	92	6	157	218-335	
Old English Sharp	1 oz	83	7	159	--	
Velveeta (Variety of flavors)	1 oz	83-85	6	154-168	--	
Cream Cheese						
Whipped (Philadelphia Brand)	1 oz	84	8	37	84	Mild flavor. Use for sandwiches, dips, with bagels.
Edam*	1 oz	101	8	207	274	Mild, sometimes salty, flavor. Use for appetizers, snacks, desserts.
Farmers						
White Clover	1 oz	102	8	219	--	Clean mild flavor. Use for salads, snacks, in cooking.
Feta						
Natural (Cow's Milk) -- Arpin	1 oz	85	6	200	316	White, pickled cheese, usually crumbled. Use for salads, in cooking.
						Sweet, not as hard as Edam.

Gouda*	1 oz	101	8	198	232	Use for snacks, salads, cooking.
Heidi Ann (Part Skim) -- Natural Garden Vegetable, Lite 'N Creamy	1 oz	94-103	7	150	--	Use for appetizers, snacks.
Limburger*	1 oz	93	8	141	227	Characteristic flavor. Use on crackers, in sandwiches.
Mozzarella*	1 oz	80	6	147	132	Mild flavor. Use for Italian cooking.
Neufchatel*	1 oz	74	7	21	113	Mild flavor. Use for sandwiches, dips, salads.
Parmesan, hard*	1 oz	111	7	336	454	Sharp flavor. Use grated on salads, soups, Italian food.
Port Du Salut* , Natural	1 oz	100	8	184	151	Robust for desserts, with fruit, snacks.
Provolone*	1 oz	100	8	214	248	Mellow to sharp flavor with smokey tang. Use for desserts, appetizers; grated, if aged.
Queso Blanco						
(Mexican White Cheese) Cacique Ranchero	1 oz	87	7	N/A	--	Slightly fresh. Strong flavor when aged. Use for Mexican cooking.
Romano	1 oz	110	8	302	340	Sharp, piquant flavor. Use grated on salads, soups, Italian food.
Scamorze						
Natural Falbo	1 oz	90	6	N/A	--	Mild flavor. Use for Italian cooking.
String Cheese						
Natural Arpin	1 oz	85	6	200	--	Variety of flavors. Use for snacks.
Swiss						
Natural*	1 oz	107	8	272	74	Mild, sweet, nut-like flavor. Use for sandwiches, snacks, fondue.
Tilsit*	1 oz	96	7	198	213	Mild to medium sharp piquant flavor, Use for snacks, sandwiches.

Adapted from material from Dairy Nutrition Council, Inc., Chicago. IL 98613-4859, 1986.

*Nutrient value from Food Values, 14th ed. Jean Pennington. and Helen Church. Brand names have been given with nutrient

values as provided by the manufacturers.

RECIPE

LASAGNA

1/2 lb lasagna or any wide noodles
1/2 lb ground beef
1 medium onion, chopped
1 clove garlic, minced
1 6 oz can tomato paste
1 8 oz can tomato sauce
1/2 teaspoon salt
1/2 teaspoon oregano
2 cups low-fat cottage cheese
1/2 lb Mozzarella cheese, sliced
1/4 cup Parmesan cheese

Cook noodles in boiling salted water until tender. Brown beef with onion and garlic in skillet. Add tomato paste and sauce, salt, and oregano. Mix with cottage cheese. In an 8 x 12-inch baking dish, arrange alternate layers of noodles, Mozzarella cheese slices and sauce mixture. Top with grated Parmesan cheese. Bake at 350 degrees F for 30 minutes. Remove from oven and let stand for 15 minutes before serving. Makes 8 servings, about 315 calories/serving.

File G966 under: FOODS AND NUTRITION

D-2a, Dairy Products

Revised May 1987; 5,000 printed.

Issued in furtherance of Cooperative Extension work, Acts of May 8 and June 30, 1914, in cooperation with the U.S. Department of Agriculture. Elbert C. Dickey, Director of Cooperative Extension, University of Nebraska, Institute of Agriculture and Natural Resources.

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