

Super food or super swindle?

Yogurt

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1978: Yogurt is a (usually) low-fat, calcium-rich dairy food that has “active cultures” (though it’s not quite clear what they’re good for).

2008: Yogurt can pump up your immunity, regulate your digestive health, lower your risk of heart disease, boost your fibre, strengthen your bones, help you lose weight, and (why hold back?) turn you into a new you.

Yogurt has become prune juice, bran, and chicken soup, all rolled into one. But is it really a super food, or are the ad agencies taking us for a ride?

Here’s what to make of the claims you’ll see in the “over-the-counter” yogurt aisle.

Information compiled by Namita Davis in Toronto.

CardiUhOh

Astro BioBest Omega 3 CardioPro+ knows how to tug at your heartstrings. Its name, the red cast to the package, the Heart and Stroke Foundation’s Health Check symbol, and the “Source of Omega-3 Polyunsaturates” all imply that BioBest is best for your heart.

Yoplait Source Cardio Omega 3 takes a slightly different tack. It snags shoppers who also worry about breast cancer with its “Proud Supporter of Canadian Breast Cancer Foundation” announcement.

Cardio Shmardio. The omega-3 fats in these yogurts come from flaxseed oil. They’re not the longer-chain omega-3 fats that are found in fish oil. There’s little evidence that the ALA (alpha-linolenic acid) in flaxseed oil reduces the risk of heart disease as effectively as the DHA and EPA in fish oil.

Of course, neither yogurt will *harm* your heart because they’re low in saturated fat. And Yoplait Source is a 40-calorie bargain, thanks to its safe artificial sweetener Splenda. Just don’t assume that either yogurt equals a serving of salmon.



A Best Bite, but no substitute for salmon.



Yoptimal’s “strengthens your immune system” claim is illegal.

Noptimal

“Strengthens your immune system,” says the label on Yoplait Yoptimal Immuni+. Its “2 well-known active probiotic cultures (BB-12 *Bifidobacterium* and LA-5 *Lactobacillus acidophilus*) are friendly bacteria, entering your digestive system where many of your body’s immune defenses develop.”

A 2006 press release from Yoplait went further: “When consumed regularly, these two bacteria have beneficial effects on the immune system and global health.” That sounds like they can prevent everything from colds to cancer.

But when we pressed Yoplait for details, the claims became less bold. “While there are no studies on the link between consuming Yoptimal Immuni+ and immunity,” a media representative e-mailed us, “Yoptimal Immuni+ contains ingredients which are scientifically proven to help strengthen the immune system.”

What’s the evidence? Yoplait has no studies showing that healthy people who eat either of the two probiotic bacteria in Yoptimal are less likely to get sick. And Chr. Hansen, the Danish company that supplies Yoplait with the bacteria, could only cite “a smattering of animal studies, test tube studies, and studies on people with specific problems (like infants with eczema).”

Here’s some evidence that might interest Yoplait. Yoptimal’s “strengthens your immune system” claim is illegal. According to the Canadian Food Inspection Agency, any time a company suggests that a food “promotes health of the immune system,” it’s making a drug claim, which isn’t allowed on foods.

Astro BioBest Maximmunité yogurt drink is more subtle. “Only Maximmunité has the Immunofit culture blend your natural defenses will love daily,” says the label. But the company won’t even say which bacteria it adds. Note to Astro: a carefully worded claim doesn’t require less evidence.



Regulatte to Go?

Is Danone Fat Free Activia Fibre better than (fibreless) Danone Fat Free Activia?

Both contain *B.L. Regularis* DN-173 010. The evidence isn't rock solid, but Danone has four studies showing that Activia's bacteria can shorten "transit time"—that is, the time it takes food to move through your digestive system.¹

Whether eating *B.L. Regularis* works in those with constipation isn't clear, though, since the studies didn't look at people who had a problem. Equally muddy is whether the bacteria leads to *daily* regularity, as the label implies. (The package shows a downward arrow on a person's midsection under the words "Every Day.")

And since when did yogurt become a source of fibre? Since yogurt companies discovered inulin, a powder that's typically extracted from chicory root. Inulin is considered a fibre because humans lack the enzyme that breaks it down. But in the few decent studies that looked at inulin alone, it had no consistent effect on regularity...and led to more than a few complaints about, um, flatulence.^{2,3}

A 100-gram serving of Danone Fat Free Activia Fibre contains 2 grams of inulin. So does Astro BioBest Vitalité with TriActiv+ Pro Regulatte Blend, which also shows a midsection with an arrow spiralling down to where you want all that Regulatte to take place. But Astro wouldn't tell us which strain of bacteria it adds, much less point to evidence showing that its "Pro Regulatte" blend can help keep you regular.



With or without the added fibre, Activia's bacteria may help keep you regular.

¹ *Microb. Ecology Health Dis.* 15:15, 2003.

² *Eur. J. Clin. Nutr.* 53: 1, 1999.

³ *Br. J. Nutr.* 98: 540, 2007.

HOWGULLIBLERU?

"This great-tasting creamy yogurt offers the benefits of PROBIOTICS with the presence of 1 billion live HOWARU cultures in every 100 g serving," gushes the Proavantage label. "For optimal benefits, we recommend that you enjoy one every day!"

What benefits? The label doesn't say. And if consumers take the label's advice to visit www.howaru.com, they may be misled. The Web site boasts about several probiotic ("friendly") bacteria. According to Proavantage's ingredients list, though, the yogurt has just one: *Lactobacillus acidophilus* NCFM.

It's "one of the world's most extensively studied probiotic strains, backed by extensive documentation that proves its outstanding health benefits in terms of gut health," says a brochure from Danisco, the Danish company that supplies President's Choice with its *L. acidophilus* NCFM.

Are they talking lactose intolerance? If so, they must know that people who have trouble digesting lactose (the naturally occurring sugar in milk) generally don't have problems with *any* yogurt. And they've got to know that there's no evidence that adding *L. acidophilus* NCFM does anything for "gut health."¹

Are they talking diarrhea? They must know that NCFM has never been tested by itself.¹

Don't expect miracles from the inulin in Proavantage either. In a study of 45 healthy college students, those who were given 15 grams of inulin a day were no more "regular" than those who were given a placebo.² And besides, a serving of Proavantage has just 2 grams of inulin.

If you want a yogurt to help keep you regular, your odds are better with Danone Activia. Just keep in mind that it has never been tested on people with constipation.



"Gut health" benefits? The Prez has no proof.

¹ *J. Dairy Sci.* 84: 319, 2001.

² *Br. J. Nutr.* 98: 540, 2007.

Reconsider

"Renew. Regenerate. Revive." Who wouldn't want that yogurt?

Dairyland Alive isn't shy about making promises. And its Web site (www.aliveyogurt.com) explains "how antioxidants help fight disease," how açai berries are "Brazil's secret weapon against aging," and how to "feel your inner age!"

Depending on your *outer* age, you may or may not be able to read the label's fine print. If you can, you may not feel so renewed, regenerated, and revived.



Alive has no evidence for any of its claims.

The Vanilla Pomegranate, for example, has a "fruit preparation" that consists of "sugar, water, lemon pulp, modified corn starch, natural flavour, pomegranate juice concentrate, pectin, green tea extract, vanilla extract, lemon juice concentrate, natural colour, potassium sorbate, pomegranate extract, wild blueberry extract, tomato extract, carrot extract, elderberry extract, chokeberry extract."

The Web site refers visitors to the Canadian Cancer Society, which essentially urges consumers to "choose foods high in antioxidants." Yogurt sweetened with sugar plus extracts probably wasn't what the good folks at the society had in mind.

The Culture Club

We've listed the criteria for our **Best Bites** (✓✓)—*maximums* for calories, saturated fat, and sugar and *minimums* for protein and calcium—at the top of each section. For example, a 100-gram yogurt needs at least 10% of a day's calcium and 3 grams of protein, and no more than 100 calories, 1 gram of sat fat, and 17 grams of sugar (naturally occurring plus added).

Within each section, products are ranked from least to most sat fat, then least to most calories, most to least calcium, least to most sugar, and most to least protein.

Yogurt (100 grams unless noted)	Calories	Saturated Fat (g)	Sugars (g)	Protein (g)	Calcium (%DV)
Best Bites: 100 1 17 3+ 10+					
✓✓ Astro Fat Free Zero ^D	40	0	4	4	10
✓✓ Yoplait Source, 0% M.F. ^D	40	0	4	4	10
✓✓ Yoplait Source Cardio Omega 3, 0% M.F. ^D	40	0	4	4	10
✓✓ Yoplait Source Dessert Selection, 0% M.F. ^D	40	0	4	4	10
✓✓ Yoplait Source Exotik Selection, 0% M.F. ^D	40	0	4	4	10
✓✓ Yoplait Source Vanilla Tango Selection, 0% M.F. ^D	40	0	4	4	10
✓✓ Danone Silhouette, 0% M.F. ^D	40	0	5	3	10
✓✓ President's Choice Blue Menu Finesse, 0% M.F. ^D	50	0	3	3	10
✓✓ Astro Original All Natural Fat Free	70	0	13	4	15
✓✓ Danone Activia Fat Free ^{1D}	80	0	14	4	15
✓✓ No Name	80	0	12	3	10
✓✓ Yoplait Basket	80	0	13	4	10
✓✓ Liberty Organic Svelte (113 g) ¹	90	0	14	7	10
✓✓ Astro BioBest, Plain	60	0.5	7	4	15
✓✓ Danone Silhouette Mousse (95 g)	70	0.5	10	6	15
✓✓ Astro Naturally Flavoured	70	0.5	11	4	10
✓✓ Danone Activia Fibre, Fat Free ^D	80	0.5	13	4	10
✓✓ Astro BioBest, except Plain	80	0.5	13	3	10
✓✓ Astro BioBest Calcium CalcioPro+ ¹	90	0.5	13	3	20
✓✓ Astro BioBest Omega 3 CardioPro+ ¹	90	0.5	13	3	10
✓✓ Dairyland Alive ¹	90	1	13	4	15
✓✓ President's Choice Creamy ^D	90	1	12	3	10
✓✓ Danone Creamy ^D	90	1	13	4	10
✓✓ Yoplait Creamy Duo	90	1	15	3	10
President's Choice Proavantage ^D	90	1	12	3	8
Astro Smooth 'n Fruity	110	1	16	3	10
Yoplait Creamy	90	1.5	14	4	10
Danone Naturalia	100	1.5	14	5	15
Danone Activia Fibre ¹	100	1.5	13	4	10
President's Choice Organics (113 g) ¹	110	1.5	13	5	10
Danone Activia ¹	100	2	14	4	15
Astro BioBest Vitalité ¹	100	2	13	3	10
Yoplait Yoptimal Immuni+ ^D	100	2	13	3	10
Stonyfield Farm Organic ^{1D}	100	2	14	5	10
Yoplait Creamy Choco	110	2	17	3	10
Astro Original All Natural ¹	100	2.5	13	3	9

Calories
Saturated Fat (g)
Sugars (g)
Protein (g)
Calcium (%DV)

Danone Danissimo ¹	110	2.5	15	4	15
Danone Danissimo Mousse (75 g)	120	3	14	3	10
President's Choice le décadent (113 g) ¹	140	4	14	5	10

Yogurt (125 grams) Best Bites: 130 1 20 4+ 13+

✓✓ Dairyland Fat Free ¹	110	0	20	5	15
Dairyland Classic Vanilla Fat Free ¹	120	0	23	4	10
✓✓ Dairyland Stirred	110	1	18	4	15
Dairyland Classic Vanilla	130	1.5	21	4	10

Yogurt (175 grams) Best Bites: 180 1.5 30 6+ 18+

✓✓ Danone Silhouette, 0% M.F., Plain ^D	80	0	9	7	20
✓✓ Liberty No Fat, Plain	90	0	7	12	20
✓✓ Neilson Fat Free	140	0	22	6	20
Neilson Fresh Flavours	140	1	19	7	15
Neilson Stirred ¹	150	1	21	5	15
✓✓ Meadowvale Stirred ¹	130	1.5	19	6	25
✓✓ Danone Creamy, Coffee	150	1.5	24	6	20
Liberty Six Grains	150	2	18	8	25
Liberty Organic, except Plain ¹	170	2	20	8	15
Hewitt's Natural ¹	190	2	27	8	25
Liberty Goat—Honey, Raspberry, Strawberry, or Vanilla ¹	170	2.5	16	12	30
Liberty Müesli ¹	220	2.5	23	10	15
Liberty Organic, Plain	110	3	6	10	20
Neilson Fruit Bottom	170	3	22	6	20
Liberty ¹	180	3	23	7	25
Liberty Minimix ¹	220	3	24	8	20
President's Choice Crunchy & Creamy ¹	240	3	21	8	20
Hewitt's Goat Milk	190	3.5	27	7	25
Astro Original All Natural, Cappuccino	180	4.5	20	5	15
Astro Original Balkan Style, Natural	140	6	4	6	20
Liberty Méditerranée, except Plain ¹	250	9	23	6	20
Liberty Méditerranée, Plain	220	11	6	7	25

Cultured Soy (125 grams) Best Bites: 180 1.5 30 3+ 18+

So Nice, Plain	90	0.5	4	5	2
So Nice, except Plain ¹	120	0.5	16	4	2
✓✓ Yoso Soy	150	0.5	15	5	20

Smoothies (94 mL) Best Bites: 100 1 15 4+ 10+

President's Choice Proavantage	80	1	10	3	10
Astro BioBest Maximmunité	80	1	11	3	10
Danone DanActive	90	1	16	3	10

Smoothies Best Bites: 150 1.5 30 8+ 20+

Happy Planet Organic Pro (200 mL) ^{1D}	150	1	26	5	15
✓✓ Elwest Low Fat Kefir (250 mL)	100	1.5	11	8	25
Astro BioBest (200 mL)	150	1.5	26	5	20
Liberty Organic Kefir, Plain (175 mL)	90	2	6	6	20
Liberty Organic Kefir, except Plain (175 mL)	140	2	21	5	15
Elwest Classic Kefir (250 mL)	140	4	11	8	25

✓✓ Best Bite. ^DContains added vitamin D. ¹Average.

Daily Limits (for a 2,000-calorie diet): **Saturated Fat:** 20 grams. **Sugar:** 40 grams (10 teaspoons). **Calcium Daily Value (DV):** 1,100 mg.

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