

Savoring Cheese Ounce by Ounce

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From creamy to crumbly, tangy to nutty, sweet to pungent, cheese captivates our taste buds. The aroma, texture, and mouthfeel of cheese unite at the first bite creating a sensory sensation. Along with generating a “sensory buzz,” cheese provides the body with essential nutrients, including calcium and protein. Unfortunately, the fat content of cheese deters many would-be connoisseurs. By creatively incorporating small amounts of cheese into meals and snacks, the flavor can be enjoyed without guilt.

Adding small amounts of cheese can take a meal or snack from bland to tasty. A one ounce serving of cheese, the size of 4 dice, adds a culinary zing to soups, salads, entrees and snacks. Shred it! Melt it! Slice it! Grate it! Grab an ounce of cheese and try one of the cheese ideas below to enhance your next meal or snack.

- Cheddar:** Top a bowl of vegetarian chili with shredded Cheddar cheese.
- Edam:** Pair small cubes of Edam cheese with grapes for an afternoon snack.
- Gouda:** Melt Gouda cheese over steamed broccoli.
- Gruyere:** Finely grate Gruyere cheese over mashed butternut squash.
- Manchego:** Pair thin slices of Manchego cheese and quince paste for a quick and tasty appetizer.
- Monterey Jack:** Grate Monterey Jack cheese over peppers, mushrooms and black beans in a Southwestern omelet.
- Mozzarella, low-moisture, part-skim:** Melt part-skim Mozzarella cheese over thin slices of tomato on toasted ciabatta bread.
- Muenster:** Melt small cubes of Muenster cheese over ratatouille.
- Provolone:** Serve freshly grated Provolone cheese with minestrone soup.
- Swiss:** Melt shredded Swiss cheese over thin apple slices and serve on a slice of toasted bread.

To optimize the quality and sensory experience of cheese follow these cheese tidbits. First, taste the cheese before purchasing. Be sure you are satisfied with the taste, texture and aroma. Second, buy the quantity of cheese you can consume in 1 or 2 sittings. Buying cheese in small amounts will ensure freshness. Finally, if you are shredding or grating cheese, use cold cheese directly from the refrigerator. In contrast, if you are serving cheese in small cubes or thin slices, serve it at room temperature.

While the cheese varieties listed above have unique tastes, textures, and aromas; they all are crammed with calcium and packed with protein. Here is a closer look at these two important nutrient sources along with a profile of the fat content of these cheeses:

Nutrient	Health Benefits	Amount in 1 oz of Cheese Examples
Calcium	Strengthens bone and limits bone loss Minimizes PMS symptoms Decreases risk of high blood pressure	At least 200 mg (20% of recommended intake)
Protein	Builds and repairs body tissue Regulates hormones and enzymes Enables antibodies to resist infection	7-9 g (same amount of protein in 1 oz of meat)
Fat	Carries Vitamin A and other fat soluble vitamins into the body Provides a feeling of fullness Source of the smooth, creamy flavor and mouthfeel of cheese	5-8 g

Those with lactose intolerance may be able to enjoy these cheeses without discomfort. These aged cheeses contain negligible amounts of lactose. Most of the lactose is removed with the whey during cheesemaking. Any remaining lactose converts to lactic acid during the aging process. With minimal lactose, these aged cheeses can provide a significant source of calcium to those with lactose intolerance.

One ounce of cheese, the size of 4 dice, adds depth and sensory excitement to an appetizer, entrée, vegetable or fruit. Strive to reap the flavor and nutrient benefits of cheese by practicing portion control. Eat slowly and enjoy. Cheese is packed with flavor and a little can truly go a long ways.