

Doing Dairy Right

BY JAYNE HURLEY
& BONNIE LIEBMAN

Dairy fat—the kind that comes in butter, milk, and cheese—is saturated, plain and simple.

So if you want to spare your arteries, you need to switch to (trans-free) margarine, fat-free or low-fat milk, or reduced-fat hard cheese (see October 2004, p. 12).

But you've also got to watch the sour cream you spoon onto your baked potato, the ricotta you tuck into your lasagna, the cream cheese you use for your Sunday "schmear," and the cheese spreads that grace your crackers. Each can pack a wallop of heart trouble. Here's how to dodge it without disappointing your taste buds.

Sour Cream

Two tablespoons of full-fat sour cream deliver three grams of saturated fat. That's 15 percent of your daily limit of bad fat.

But all the fat-frees we tasted were bland and not very creamy (**Cabot Vermont** and **Daisy** are the best of the bunch, though they taste more like plain yogurt).

Solution: try a reduced-fat (like **Breakstone's**) or a light (like **Friendship**, **Land O Lakes**, or **Cabot Vermont**). They cut the sat fat from three grams to two or 1½ (in two tablespoons). But blindfolded, you could easily mistake them for full-fat.

If you can find **Vermont Butter & Cheese Company Fromage Blanc**, you're in business. The company has figured out how to turn fat-free milk into something that tastes exactly like rich, full-fat sour cream. (It's listed under Miscellaneous in our chart.)

Cottage Cheese

A bowl of cottage cheese with sliced bananas, blueberries, or peaches is a classic. But half a cup of regular, full-fat cottage cheese (the label will say 4% milkfat) chews up three of your 20 grams of saturated fat for the entire day.

Why bother when you can get away with half that much in an equally creamy 2% milkfat cottage cheese? Most companies make one.

Friendship, **Light n' Lively**, **Borden**, **Knudsen**, and others offer 1% milkfat cottage cheese. While not as creamy as 2%, they're a real bargain at no more than one gram of sat fat per half cup.

Fat-free cottage cheese? You're skating on thin ice. Some (**Breakstone's Free Small Curd**, for example) are bland, others taste too salty or sour. Some companies jazz up their 1% or fat-free cottage cheese by adding fruit—usually pineapple—plus sugar or artificial sweeteners.

And remember to check the sodium on your cottage cheese label. Most plain ones range from 400 to 500 mg in a half cup. While less is better, don't even think about "no salt added" brands. Even the salt shaker can't fix them.

Cream Cheese

Cream cheese is more cream than cheese.

Two tablespoons coat your arteries with five or six grams of saturated fat (and only two grams of protein—much less than most cheeses).

Our advice: ratchet down the fat until your taste buds say "uncle." Neufchâtel—a spreadable unripened white cheese—brings the sat fat to four

grams, yet looks and tastes exactly like full-fat cream cheese. Whipped cream cheese slices off another half gram by replacing cream cheese with air. (If you like flavored cream cheese, try **Philadelphia Whipped Cinnamon 'N Brown Sugar** on cinnamon-raisin toast or **Whipped Mixed Berry** on a blueberry bagel.)

Most people will have no argument with light cream cheese (three grams of sat fat), especially if it's sitting under a layer of lox and freshly sliced red onion and tomato.

Fat-frees may disappoint some taste buds, though. Philadelphia's fat-free tub may taste richer than its fat-free brick, but it still registers as sour on some tongues. In fact, the **Fat Free Strawberry** tub works best probably because its sweetness masks its sourness.



Catch it if you can. Zero fat, and it's a dead ringer for lusciously full-fat sour cream.

Whipped Topping

There's nothing like a little whipped topping to lure non-fruit-lovers to a bowl of fresh berries. But odds are, "a little" is at least double the serving that appears on labels—two (level) tablespoons. While our chart uses a more-realistic four-tablespoon serving (a quarter-cup), stopping there is no piece of cake, either.

Luckily, you can now find fat-free **Reddi Wip** and **Cool Whip**. They're airy and surprisingly good. Just keep in mind that "fat-free" means less than half a gram of fat in two tablespoons. Keep eating and you'll move out of fat-free range.

That's a problem, especially with **Cool Whip**, since the brand is largely hydrogenated coconut and palm kernel oils (**Reddi Wip** is cream). Both oils are fully, not partially, hydrogenated, so they don't contain trans fat. But they're saturated, so you can't pile it on like there's no tomorrow.

Reddi Wip Light, with half a gram of sat fat, is also a Best Bite. It's denser and richer than the fat-frees and has that marvelous mouthfeel of ice-cream-parlor whipped cream. Of course, that just makes it harder to stop at four tablespoons.



Light makes right. Whether it's cheese spread, sour cream, cream cheese, or whipped topping, the "lights" lose some fat but not taste.

Spreads

They range from gourmet brands with French names (**Alouette**, **Rondelé**) to office holiday party fare (**Kaukauna**, **WisPride**) to Super Bowl party staples (**Price's**).

If you're not careful, a modest two-tablespoon serving of cheese spread can coat your crackers— not to mention your arteries—with five to

eight grams of saturated fat. Fortunately, some brands have seen the "light."

Alouette, **Boursin**, **Fleur de Lait**, and **Rondelé** each has a line of light spreads that cuts the sat fat to three grams or less. (Only **Fleur de Lait** is a good source of calcium.)

We tried each brand's garlic and herb flavor. Our favorite: **Boursin Light Garlic & Fine Herbs**. The company infuses its first-rate cheese with a complex mix of garlic, parsley, and chives. But the others also have their charms. **Rondelé Lite Garlic & Herbs** has a deep peppery cast, **Alouette Light Garlic & Herbs** delivers a delicate onion flavor, and **Fleur de Lait Light Minced Garlic & Herbs** is spiked with chunks of real garlic.

The **Laughing Cow** cheeses are a hot commodity. The individually wrapped **Light Creamy**, **Original Creamy Swiss**, and **Light Gourmet Cheese Bites** are portable process cheese. But their rich taste and tangy bite are a far cry from American cheese.

Kaukauna Lite and **WisPride Lite**—they're the same cheese spreads sold under different brand names—aren't quite as notable. The **Lite Port Wine**, for example, has zero wine taste (as does the non-lite version).

Some brands are low enough in saturated fat (three grams) to get a Best Bite, even though they're not light. **Heluva Good** spreads are far richer and creamier than the **Kaukaunas** and **WisPrides**. The **Port Wine** tastes like it contains something you had to remove a cork to get. The **Sharp Cheddar & Horseradish** has the intensity of freshly grated horseradish.

Rising Sun Farms' delicious **Lite Pesto Dried Tomato Cheese Torta** is also a real find. Each dip gets a slightly different mix of its three layers: pesto, dried tomato, and **Neufchâtel** cheese.

Unripened Goat Cheese

"Chèvre" means goat in French. But for many people, it means a rich, full-flavored cheese that you'd never expect to be lowish in fat. In fact, we found enough Best Bites to keep you in goat cheese for some time.

Soft goat cheeses are 60 percent water, which keeps the sat fat (and, unfortunately, the calcium) down. But the taste is anything but diluted.

One nibble of just about any of our Best Bites—**Chavrie** or **Vermont Butter & Cheese Company Creamy Goat Cheese**, for example—and you'll swear they've got more than three grams of sat fat.



Healthier hors d'oeuvres. Chèvre—unripened goat cheese—makes a marvelous spread with less saturated fat than most cheeses.

Miscellaneous

Crème fraîche (French for fresh cream) is a thickened cream that restaurants often spoon over soups or desserts. But just two tablespoons carry seven grams of saturated fat—a third of a day's worth. **Mascarpone**, an Italian double- or triple-cream cheese that's often used to make tiramisu or served on top of fresh fruit, has eight grams of sat fat.

More familiar to most people is **ricotta**. It's the traditional cheese in lasagna, stuffed shells, and ravioli. Luckily, you can now find fat-free, low-fat, and light versions. All get Best Bites (no more than two grams of sat fat in a quarter cup). Part-skim, at three grams of sat fat, has only a third less sat fat than whole-milk ricotta. 🍌

The information for this article was compiled by Emily Poole.





Bessie's Best

Best Bites have no more than 3 grams of saturated fat with several exceptions: sour cream, ricotta cheese, and cottage cheese have no more than 2 grams, and whipped topping has no more than 1 gram. And all except cottage cheese have no more than 250 milligrams of sodium (the limit for cottage cheese is 480 mg). Spreads get Honorable Mentions if they have no more than 350 mg of sodium.

The saturated fat, calories, and other numbers for sour cream, cottage cheese, and cream cheese don't vary much from brand to brand. So we've listed generic numbers—or numbers from cream-cheese giant Philadelphia—in the chart.

Within each section, products are ranked from least to most saturated fat and sodium, then most to least calcium, then least to most calories.

	Calories	Total Fat (grams)	Saturated Fat (grams)	Calcium (% DV)	Sodium (mg)
Sour Cream (2 Tbs.)					
✓✓ Sour cream, fat-free, all brands	20	0	0	4	50
✓✓ Sour cream, light, all brands	30	3	1.5	3	20
✓✓ Sour cream, reduced-fat, all brands	40	3	2.0	3	20
Sour cream, full-fat, all brands	50	5	3.0	3	10
Cottage Cheese (1/2 cup, unless noted)					
✓✓ Cottage cheese, fat-free, plain, all brands	80	0	0	11	430
✓✓ Cottage cheese, 1% milkfat, fruited, all brands	120	1	0.5	7	330
✓✓ Cottage cheese, 1% milkfat, plain, all brands	80	1	0.5	7	460
✓✓ Breakstone's or Knudsen Cottage Doubles (1 container) ¹	140	3	1.5	8	390
✓✓ Cottage cheese, 2% milkfat, plain, all brands	100	2	1.5	8	460
Cottage cheese, 4% milkfat, plain, all brands	110	5	3.0	7	440
Cream Cheese (2 Tbs.)					
✓✓ Philadelphia Fat Free, brick or tub ¹	30	0	0	13	200
✓✓ Philadelphia Light, tub ¹	60	4	3.0	4	160
Philadelphia Whipped, tub ¹	60	6	3.5	0	100
Philadelphia Neufchâtel, brick	70	6	4.0	2	120
Philadelphia Regular, tub	90	9	5.0	2	130
Philadelphia Original, brick	100	9	6.0	2	110
Whipped Topping (4 Tbs.)					
✓✓ Reddi Wip Fat Free	10	0	0	0	0
✓✓ Cool Whip Free	30	0	0	0	10
✓✓ Reddi Wip Light	20	1	0.5*	0	0

	Calories	Total Fat (grams)	Saturated Fat (grams)	Calcium (% DV)	Sodium (mg)
Reddi Wip Original	30	2	1.5*	0	0
Reddi Wip Extra Creamy	30	3	2.0*	0	0
Cool Whip Lite	40	2	2.0	0	0
Cool Whip	50	3	3.0	0	0
Cool Whip Extra Creamy	50	4	4.0	0	10
Spreads (2 Tbs., unless noted)					
✓ The Laughing Cow Light Creamy (3/4 oz. wedge) ¹	40	2	1.0	6	260
✓ Price's Real Cheese! Light	60	3	1.5	7	270
✓ The Laughing Cow Light Gourmet Cheese Bites (1 oz.—7 bites)	40	2	1.5	8	350
✓✓ Boursin Light Garlic & Fine Herbs	40	3	2.0	2	130
✓✓ Kaukauna Lite or WisPride Lite, tub ¹	70	4	2.0	15	190
✓✓ Alouette Light ¹	50	4	2.5	2	60
✓✓ Rising Sun Farms Lite Pesto Dried Tomato Cheese Torta	70	4	2.5	6	130
✓ The Laughing Cow Original Creamy Swiss (3/4 oz. wedge)	50	4	2.5	6	250
✓ Price's Deli Style or Real Cheese! ¹	80	7	2.5	7	260
✓✓ Fleur de Lait Light ¹	60	5	3.0	10	170
✓✓ Rondelé Lite ¹	60	5	3.0	4	180
✓✓ Kaukauna or WisPride, tub ¹	90	7	3.0	15	200
✓✓ Heluva Good, tub ¹	90	7	3.0	15	210
✓✓ Kaukauna Deli Style or WisPride, chunk ¹	90	7	3.0	15	210
✓✓ Kaukauna Deli Style or WisPride Deli Style, ball or log, except Swiss ¹	90	6	3.0	15	230
Tiger Assorted (1 oz. wedge)	90	7	3.0	25	370
Kaukauna Deli Style or WisPride Deli Style Swiss, ball	80	6	3.0	15	420
Bingham Hill, tub ¹	70	6	4.0	2	80
Kraft Pimento	80	6	4.0	2	140
Rondelé Pub Cheese ¹	70	7	4.0	4	150
Kaukauna Deli Style or WisPride Deli Style Cheddar & Cream Cheese Spread, ball ¹	100	7	4.0	15	190
Kraft Olive & Pimento	80	7	4.0	2	200
Hans' All Natural ¹	100	6	4.0	13	230
Kaukauna Connoisseur Spreadable Cheese Wheel ¹	90	6	4.0	15	240
Kaukauna Connoisseur Cheese Spread ¹	90	7	4.0	15	250
Alouette ¹	80	7	4.5	2	90
Kaukauna Connoisseur Spreadable Cream Cheese Wheel ¹	110	7	4.5	2	110
Rondelé Gourmet Spreadable Cheese ¹	70	7	4.5	3	140
Athenos Basil & Tomato or Original Feta Spread ²	80	7	5.0	4	190
Alouette Crème de Brie ¹	90	8	5.0	8	220
Kraft Old English	90	8	5.0	15	520
Vermont Gourmet ¹	100	9	5.5	3	140
Rondelé Bagel Temptations ¹	100	9	5.5	2	140
Rondelé Bread Essentials ¹	100	9	5.5	6	170

Dairy Delights



Illustration: Loel Barr.

Not sure what to do with sour cream or ricotta cheese? Does the price of cheese spreads make you cringe? Here's a handful of easy answers from *Nutrition Action's* Tamara Goldis—some just right for holiday entertaining.

	Calories	Total Fat (grams)	Saturated Fat (grams)	Calcium (% DV)	Sodium (mg)
Kaukauna Deli Style or WisPride Deli Style Cream Cheese Spread, ball or tub ¹	110	9	5.5	2	180
Betts' Fresh Garden Garlic	90	9	6.0	2	150
Alouette Elegante ¹	100	9	6.0	2	150
Rondelé Pasteurized Cheese Spread Garlic & Herbs	100	9	6.0	2	180
Cibo Naturals Soft Flavored Cheese ¹	130	13	7.0	1	190
Boursin ¹	120	13	8.0	2	190

Unripened Goat Cheese (1 oz.)

✓✓ Coach Farm Low Fat	50	3	1.5	4	100
✓✓ Soignon Fromage de Chèvre, tub	40	3	2.0	2	120
✓✓ Chavrie, tub ¹	50	4	2.5	2	130
✓✓ Vermont Butter & Cheese Company Creamy ¹	50	5	3.0	6	70
✓✓ Cypress Grove Chevre Fromage A Trois	70	5	3.0	2	70
✓✓ Montchevré Chèvre Cranberry Cinnamon	80	5	3.0	2	100
✓✓ Cypress Grove Chevre Fromage Blanc, tub	60	5	3.0	0	100
✓✓ Westfield Farm Capri, except Chocolate ¹	70	5	3.0	4	110
Coach Farm Fresh	70	5	3.5	2	70
Vermont Butter & Cheese Company Chèvre ¹	80	6	4.0	4	50
Cypress Grove Chevre, log or round ¹	70	6	4.0	2	90
Belmont Chèvre ¹	70	6	4.0	2	130
Capricorn Chèvre ¹	70	6	4.0	2	130
Gourmet Goat Original or Roasted Garlic ²	70	6	4.0	2	130
Madame-Chèvre Fine Herbs or Original ²	70	6	4.0	2	130
Montchevré Chèvre, except Cranberry Cinnamon ¹	70	6	4.0	2	130
Silver Goat Chevre	70	6	4.0	2	130
Montrachet Garlic & Herbs or Original ²	70	6	4.0	2	140
Chevrolle ¹	80	6	4.5	2	130
Ile De France La Bûchette ¹	80	7	5.0	10	90
Ile De France Petite Bûche ¹	80	7	5.0	10	90
Westfield Farm Capri Chocolate	110	8	5.0	4	110

Miscellaneous (1/4 cup, unless noted)

✓✓ Ricotta, fat-free, all brands	50	0	0	18	80
✓✓ Vermont Butter & Cheese Company Fromage Blanc	30	0	0	10	100
✓✓ Ricotta, light or low-fat, all brands	70	3	2.0	16	60
Ricotta, part-skim, all brands	90	5	3.0	17	80
Ricotta, whole milk, all brands	110	8	5.0	13	50
Crème fraîche, all brands (2 Tbs.)	110	11	7.0	3	10
Mascarpone, all brands (2 Tbs.)	130	13	8.0	3	20

✓✓ Best Bite. ✓ Honorable Mention. ¹Average of the entire line. ²Average of the varieties listed. *CSPI estimate.

Daily Values (DVs—daily limits for a 2,000-calorie diet): **Total Fat:** 65 grams. **Saturated Fat:** 20 grams. **Calcium:** 1,000 milligrams. **Sodium:** 2,400 milligrams.

Sources: manufacturers and U.S. Department of Agriculture.

The use of information from this article for commercial purposes is strictly prohibited without written permission from CSPI.

Apple Walnut Goat Cheese

- 1 8-ounce goat cheese log, at room temperature**
- 1 Granny Smith apple, cored and chopped**
- 1/2 cup chopped walnuts**
- 1/2 tsp. cinnamon**

In a medium bowl, mix all the ingredients with a fork until blended. Place the mixture on a sheet of wax paper or plastic wrap and reshape into a log. Roll up in the wax paper or plastic wrap and refrigerate until firm. Serve with ginger snaps or crackers. Makes 2 1/2 cups (40 Tbs.).

PER SERVING (2 Tbs.)

Calories: 60 Sodium: 60 mg
Total Fat: 5g Cholesterol: 10 mg
Saturated Fat: 3g Carbohydrates: 2g
Fiber: 0g Protein: 3g

**Better than Boursin**

- 8 ounces Neufchâtel cream cheese, at room temperature**
- 1 garlic clove, chopped**
- 1 Tbs. fresh thyme, chopped**
- 1 tsp. fresh parsley, chopped**
- 1/2 tsp. ground black pepper**
- 1 cup light sour cream**

Beat the cream cheese, garlic, herbs, and pepper with an electric mixer until blended. Add the sour cream and beat until smooth. Refrigerate until ready to serve. Makes 2 cups (32 Tbs.).

PER SERVING (2 Tbs.)

Calories: 50 Sodium: 40 mg
Total Fat: 3g Cholesterol: 15 mg
Saturated Fat: 2g Carbohydrates: 2g
Fiber: 0g Protein: 2g

Maple Sour Cream Drizzle

- 3/4 cup light sour cream**
- 1/4 cup maple syrup**

Stir the sour cream and maple syrup together until blended. Serve over fresh fruit or in place of icing on cake or other desserts. Makes 1 cup (16 Tbs.).

PER SERVING (2 Tbs.)

Calories: 60 Sodium: 20 mg
Total Fat: 2g Cholesterol: 8 mg
Saturated Fat: 2g Carbohydrates: 8g
Fiber: 0g Protein: 2g

**Easy Ziti**

- 2 13-ounce boxes whole-wheat blend ziti or penne pasta, cooked**
- 1 26-ounce jar spaghetti sauce**
- 2 Tbs. fresh basil, chopped**
- 1 tsp. salt**
- 2 cups light ricotta cheese**
- 4 Tbs. grated Parmesan cheese**
- 1 cup shredded part-skim mozzarella**

Place the pasta in a 13" x 9" baking dish. Combine the spaghetti sauce, basil, and salt and pour evenly over the pasta. Spoon the ricotta cheese over the pasta, blending with a fork until the sauce and ricotta are mixed. Sprinkle with the Parmesan and mozzarella cheese. Bake at 350° for 20 minutes or until hot. Makes 12 servings.

PER SERVING (1 1/2 cups)

Calories: 330 Sodium: 480 mg
Total Fat: 5g Cholesterol: 15 mg
Saturated Fat: 2g Carbohydrates: 55g
Fiber: 4g Protein: 14g