Announcer: The Missouri State Journal, a weekly program keeping you in touch with Missouri State University.

Emily Yeap: In general, we all need to drink about eight glasses of fluid a day. Besides water, milk is a great drink choice for people of all ages. Nowadays, there are many different types of milk available, and choosing which one to buy can be a tad overwhelming. I'm Emily Yeap.

Joining me today is Natalie Allen, registered dietitian and clinical instructor of biomedical sciences at Missouri State University. She's here to discuss the benefits of milk and the varieties available.

Natalie Allen: One of the most important things about milk in your diet is that it provides calcium, which is great for our bone health and overall health. Milk also has protein, so it's a good alternative for people maybe who don't want to eat as much meat. It's a less expensive protein source as well. And it has a lot of vitamins and minerals. For an athlete, milk is great too in that it hydrates you after a hard weightlifting session, or a workout, or a game.

Emily Yeap: How much milk should a person consume daily?

Natalie Allen: We need about three to four servings of dairy products a day. The dairy products include cheese, yogurt, or milk. And a one cup serving or eight ounces counts as about 300 milligrams if you're using dairy milk. And remember, all milks have the same amount of calcium, whether it's skim milk, or whole milk, chocolate milk, or white milk. They're all equal.

Emily Yeap: Allen says the varieties of milk available offer people options that fit their preferences.

Natalie Allen: I think it does give us a choice in what we want to consume beverage wise. And it's great for people maybe who have a dairy allergy. It's given them certainly a lot more options. Certainly there are also milks that are lower calories and that's good for people who are wanting to watch their waist line. And for some people, it's a matter of taste preference. All milks have nutritional value in some form. When you look at the variety of milks, there's all the way from a rice milk, a quinoa milk, hemp milk, soy milk, almond milk, cashew milk, dairy milk. I mean, the choices are endless.

So our take home message from a dietitian is we want you to drink milk of some kind. And making sure, especially in children, that they are getting adequate calcium is the most important thing because your bones are able to store and build mass in your teen years up to about 20 and then to 30. After age 30, we are not able to build as much bone mass so it's really critical that we fill up those bones or I tell my patients, put a deposit of calcium in your bones during those years. Because unfortunately as you age, you're making a lot of withdrawals of calcium from your bones and we want to prevent osteoporosis in people.

Emily Yeap: Allen highlights the features and benefits of a few types of popular milk.

Natalie Allen: Probably one of the best types of milk generally all around is dairy milk. It has the most absorbable form of calcium because the calcium's naturally in the milk. So that's best for bone health. It also has a great ratio of protein to carbohydrates. It has vitamin D and some other nutrients that you need. So dairy milk, whether you choose skim, 2%, or whole is a great choice. We want children, especially from age one to two, to be drinking whole milk exclusively. You don't limit fat in kids.

Other kinds of milk that are out there that are really popular right now are the nut milks, like almond milk, cashew milk, and those are great as well. They are less calories than dairy milk. They also have calcium added to them. So they're fortified with calcium, which means they may not be quite as well absorbed. You want to shake that container really well to make sure that you get the calcium dispersed before you pour it into your glass. That's really important in those milks because the calcium can settle. But they're a great option for people maybe who don't want to have the dairy milk.

And then what I see also that are popular out there right now are the shelf stable milks that don't need to be refrigerated. And those are nice options for people that are looking for a portable alternative.

The best way to choose your milk is to choose something. Try to get some milk servings in your diet each day, particularly if you're female. And then look at what do you like? What tastes good to you? What are you likely to drink? Can you put your milk in pancake batter? Can you add it into coffee? Sneak it into your diet in different ways. The main thing is find one you like, make sure it has calcium, and then go for three to four servings a day.

Emily Yeap: That was Natalie Allen, registered dietitian and clinical instructor of biomedical sciences at MSU. I'm Emily Yeap for the Missouri State Journal.

Announcer: For more information, contact the office of University Communications at 417-836-6397. The Missouri State Journal is available online at ksmu.org.