

5 delicious ways to Have Your Cheese and Enjoy It Too

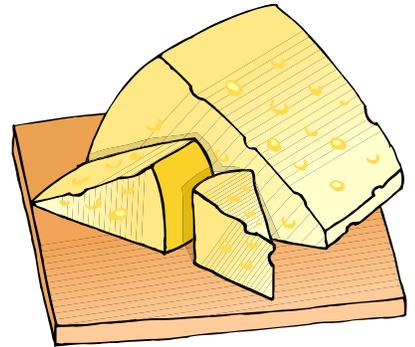
Cheese is a tasty, versatile food that is enjoyed worldwide. The U.S. produces many kinds of cheese – and more varieties are always appearing! North Carolina cheese makers produce local varieties from both cows' and goats' milk. Cheese does not have to cost a lot. Try Asiago, baby Swiss, cheddar or yogurt cheese. There are many ways to enjoy cheese.

1. Choose cheese wisely.

Most grocery stores have a variety of natural cheeses. Look in the dairy, deli and specialty sections. Check the “sell by” date and look for packaging that is tightly sealed and clean. You can use lower-fat cheeses for cooking. Part-skim mozzarella is perfect for pizza. Savor the rich, full flavors of regular cheese in moderation.

2. Store cheese properly.

Keep cheese in the coldest part of the fridge, not in the door. Grated cheese can be frozen for up to four months. Most other cheese does not keep its proper texture after freezing. Use soft cheese (cream, cottage, ricotta, etc.) within two weeks. Hard cheese may keep four to eight weeks when tightly wrapped. If mold grows, cut ½ inch off the moldy side and use within one week.



3. Cut cheese carefully.

It is easiest to cut cheese right after you take it out of the refrigerator. Use a clean, sharp knife and only cut as much as you plan to use at one time. The texture of cheese gets worse if it warms and cools over and over. Cutting for a cheese plate can be done ahead of time. Just be sure to cover the cheese well and put it back in the fridge until 30 minutes before serving.

4. Serve cheese sensibly.

Hard cheeses taste best at room temperature, so take cheese out of the fridge 30 minutes before eating it. Keep it covered while it sits. Fresh cheeses are best served cold, like milk. It's a good idea to pre-cut cheese you serve. A 1- to 1½-ounce serving is about the size of four stacked dice, two dominos or a cheese stick. Cheese, wheat crackers and fruit make a tasty snack for a family outing.

5. Pair cheese properly.

Cheese and wine is a well known pair. But each cheese also goes better with some foods than others. Wondering what tastes best with your favorite cheese? Go to www.eatwisconsincheese.com/pairings/default.aspx. This online tool is from the Wisconsin Cheese Board. It will help you pair cheese with food and drinks.

A special note for pregnant women: Do not eat soft cheeses such as feta, Brie, Camembert, blue-veined cheeses and Mexican-style cheeses such as “queso blanco fresco.”