

Cheese ... In ... Space.

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As Discovery Takes Flight, Cheese Becomes Fuel for Astronauts on Board Favorites Include Mozzarella, American and Swiss

WASHINGTON, Oct. 26 /PRNewswire/ -- The power of cheese will reach new heights October 29 as the space shuttle Discovery launches with precious cargo -- Senator John Glenn, six other crew members and an ample supply of cheese.

As the National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA) prepares Senator Glenn and the crew for the mission, their diet in space is of primary concern. A glance at the menu shows calcium-rich cheese as a favorite selection, from macaroni and cheese to cheese spread to cauliflower and cheese.

The topic of calcium is particularly relevant to the upcoming mission. According to an article in Newsweek (Oct. 26th issue), space travel takes its toll on the body, notably in the areas of bone and muscle mass. Seventy-seven-year-old Glenn's journey into orbit will enable scientists to monitor the effects of space travel on the body.

These are almost identical to the effects of aging where the skeletal system slowly dissolves, often resulting in such conditions as osteoporosis.

Foods containing calcium, like cheese, have proven to be effective in helping to maintain strong bones and combat the onset of osteoporosis.

A one-ounce serving of Cheddar cheese is an excellent source of calcium, providing 20% of the recommended daily intake.

NASA introduces this popular dairy product into the training program long before take off. The cafeteria at NASA's Johnson Space Center in Houston, Texas regularly features cheese with a variety of sandwiches and salads offered daily. According to Harry Conran, NASA cafeteria manager, astronauts' favorite cheeses include mozzarella, American and Swiss.

It's now time for those who aren't astronauts to understand the important role cheese plays in a well-balanced diet, according to Ruth Carey, a registered dietitian (RD) who consults with such organizations as The U.S. Olympic Committee and Nike Inc. "Cheese is a terrific food that contains many essential nutrients like calcium, phosphorus and protein. It also helps to maintain that energy level we all need to get through the day," said Carey.

A recently-completed survey of 1,002 men and women conducted by the National Cheese Institute (NCI) and the American Dairy Association (ADA) shows that educating the public about cheese's nutritional value needs to continue.

According to the survey, 75% queried said they eat cheese because it tastes good, while less than half said they eat cheese because it is nutritious. "This tells us two things," said Carey.

"People are motivated by taste. That's the good news and something cheese is famous for delivering. The challenge now is to let people in on the secret that our country's astronauts have discovered: cheese plays an important role in a well-balanced diet."

The survey forms part of a consumer education program co-funded by NCI and ADA. NCI is the trade association for manufacturers, processors, marketers and distributors of all types of cheese and cheese products. Founded in 1927, NCI has 95 member companies, which market more than 80 percent of U.S. national and processed cheeses and cheese products. ADA is the marketing arm of Dairy Management Inc., the domestic and international planning and management organization responsible for increasing demand for dairy products on behalf of America's dairy farmers.