

Myths about Dairy Food



Fact Sheet

National Medical Association
1012 Tenth Street, NW Washington, DC 20001
www.NMAnet.org
202.347.1895 Phone
202.898.2510 Fax



Food myths can lead to needless dietary omissions as well as to nutritional deficiencies. According to a 2006 report by the American Dietetic Association (ADA), dietary myths can have harmful effects on consumers' health and well-being. As with many other foods, misinformation about milk and milk products has subsisted for centuries.

Importance of Dairy Foods in the Diet

Milk, cheese and yogurt are naturally nutrient-rich foods providing calcium, potassium, other minerals and vitamins, and protein essential for human growth and development. Milk is also an excellent source of vitamin D and calcium. As a result, the 2005 Dietary Guidelines for Americans recommends three servings of low-fat and fat-free milk and milk products each day to help provide adequate calcium, potassium, vitamin A and magnesium – vital minerals that were identified as “nutrients of concern” for adults because of widespread under-consumption. Based on research, the Dietary Guidelines determined that **people who consume more dairy foods - milk, cheese and yogurt** - have better overall diets and see improved bone health, which is why, ultimately, low-fat milk and milk products were included as one of the “food groups to encourage” - low-fat milk and milk products, fruits, vegetables and whole grains.¹

Pervasive Dairy Food Myths & Persuasive Dairy Food Facts

■ MYTH #1: People who are sensitive to lactose should avoid milk and other dairy foods

■ FACTS:

- African-Americans should get 3-4 servings of dairy foods a day to reduce the risk of calcium-related chronic diseases for which they are at the greatest risk.²
- When considering milk alternatives, the 2005 Dietary Guidelines for Americans recommends lactose-free milk or yogurt with live, active cultures for those with lactose sensitivity to get dairy's nutrient-rich health benefits in a form that may be better tolerated.
- The NMA Consensus Report also states that lactose intolerance doesn't mean dairy intolerance. Some people with lactose intolerance can drink up to one cup of milk with a meal without developing symptoms.

■ MYTH #2: Hormones in milk cause early puberty in girls

■ FACTS:

- According to government and pediatric health experts, there is no scientific evidence to support the notion that rBGH,

a hormone supplement some farmers administer to cows, affects human growth and development.

- The concentration of hormones in cow's milk is very minimal relative to the level of normal human hormone production and, therefore, is of little physiological significance.

■ MYTH #3: Organic milk is healthier than regular milk

■ FACTS:

- There is no conclusive scientific evidence that organic food, including milk, is superior with regard to food safety or nutrition. Organic and regular milk contain the same unique package of nine essential nutrients, including calcium, vitamin D, and potassium, that make dairy products an important part of a healthy diet.
- All milk is tested for antibiotics to ensure it meets the government's stringent quality and safety standards.
- Certified organic products provide another option along with low-fat, lactose-free and flavored milk so it is easier for the consumer to meet the federal government's dietary recommendations for three servings of milk and milk products each day based on their preferences

Myths about Dairy Food

■ MYTH#4: Consuming dairy products can lead to weight gain

■ FACTS:

- Despite popular belief that dairy foods can be “fattening,” a study showed no difference in weight gain for adolescent girls on a high-calcium diet versus girls on a normal diet.
- Increased consumption of dairy foods as part of a reduced-calorie diet may enhance weight loss. In a 24-week study of obese adults, those who consumed a reduced-calorie diet with 3 to 4 servings of dairy foods lost a greater percentage of body weight than those taking calcium supplements and those in a low-dairy or low-calcium group.
- The variety of choices now available in the dairy case, including low-fat, fat-free, flavored, organic and lactose-free products, make dairy foods a convenient, and reliable nutrition source that should not be avoided due to misinformation. Dispelling myths that surround dairy is an important step in encouraging healthy eating as defined by the Dietary Guidelines.

■ MYTH #5: Soy beverages are a good replacement for milk

■ FACTS:

- While soy beverages are a good source of plant protein, they do not deliver the same bioavailability or nutrient package (calcium, potassium, phosphorus, protein, vitamins A, D and B12, riboflavin and niacin) found in milk.
- Infants do not need soy infant formulas over milk-based formulas unless the infant has a documented cow's-milk-protein allergy, a metabolic disease or the parents choose a vegan diet for the child. Milk allergies requiring soy infant formula/beverages are rare.



■ MYTH #6: Supplements are an acceptable method to get essential nutrients found in dairy foods

■ FACTS:

- Supplements do not offer the benefit of other associated nutrients found in dairy foods, and compliance can be a problem.
- Daily vitamin and mineral supplements at or below the Recommended Dietary Allowances are considered safe but are rarely needed by people who eat a variety of foods as recommended in the Food Guide Pyramid, however supplements are sometimes needed to meet specific nutrient requirements.⁶



For a complete list of references and additional information on the health benefits of dairy foods, visit the National Dairy Council Web site at www.nationaldairycouncil.org.

For additional information on animal and farm practices on dairy farms, visit the Dairy Farming Today Web site at www.dairyfarmingtoday.org.



Reviewed By:

Jatinder Bhatia, MD, FAAP

Medical College of Georgia, Augusta, GA

Connie Diekman, MEd, RD, LD, FADA

Washington University, St. Louis, Missouri

Christina Economos, PhD

Gerard J. and Dorothy R. Friedman School of Nutrition Science and Policy, Tufts University, Boston, Massachusetts

Robert Heaney, MD, FACP, FASNS

Creighton University, Omaha, Nebraska

Michelle May, MD

“Am I Hungry?”, P.L.L.C, Phoenix, Arizona

Wilma Wooten, MD, MPH

University of California, San Diego, San Diego, California

Kathleen Zelman, MPH, RD, LD

WebMD, Marietta, Georgia

National Medical Association Staff

Washington, DC



Endnotes

- 1 U.S. Department of Agriculture and U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. (January 2005). Dietary Guidelines for Americans, 2005. 6th ed
- 2 National Medical Association. (December 2004). The Role of Dairy and Dairy Nutrients in the Diet of African Americans.