

# NUTRITION



## F A C T S H E E T

### Debunking Dairy Food Myths

By *Jatinder Bhatia, MD*

*Section of Neonatology, Medical College of Georgia, Augusta, Georgia*

Food myths can lead to needless dietary omissions as well as to nutritional deficiencies. According to a report by the American Dietetic Association, 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. The 2005 Dietary Guidelines 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 have better overall diets and see improved bone health, which is why, ultimately, dairy was included as one of the food groups to encourage, along with whole grains, fruits and vegetables.

#### Pervasive Dairy Food Myths & Persuasive Dairy Food Facts

**MYTH:** People who are sensitive to lactose should avoid milk and other dairy foods.

**FACTS:**

- An American Academy of Pediatrics report released in 2006 recommends children with lactose intolerance include dairy foods as part of a healthy diet to get enough calcium, vitamin D, protein and other nutrients essential for bone health and overall growth.
- When considering milk alternatives, the 2005 Dietary Guidelines recommends those within the dairy food group, such as lactose-free milk or yogurt, as the most reliable and easiest way to derive the health benefits associated with dairy food consumption.
- Many people with lactose intolerance can drink up to one cup of milk with a meal without developing

symptoms. Other tips to suggest to patients for better tolerance include:

**Drink milk with food.**

**Aged cheeses like Cheddar and Swiss are low in lactose.**

**Introduce dairy foods slowly. Gradually increase the amount as tolerated.**

**Reduce it. Enjoy lactose-free milk and milk products.**

**Yogurt with active cultures helps digest lactose.**

**MYTH:** Flavored milk isn't good for children due to sugar content.

**FACTS:**

- Flavored milk delivers the same nutrients as regular milk.
- 70% of girls and 60% of boys (ages 6-11) do not meet the recommended daily amount of calcium. According to the 2005 Dietary Guidelines, small amounts of sugars added to nutrient-dense foods, such as reduced-fat milk products, may enhance the palatability of these products, thus improving nutrient intake without contributing excessive calories.
- Unflavored milk is lower in sugar than flavored milk; however, experts agree it is better for children and adolescents to drink flavored milk to ensure intake of protein, calcium, vitamin D and other nutrients

*The contents of this fact sheet have been reviewed by Connie Diekman, MEd, RD, LD, FADA, Washington University; Christina Economos, PhD, Gerard J. and Dorothy R. Friedman School of Nutrition Science and Policy, Tufts University; Robert Heaney, MD, FACP, FASNS, Creighton University; Michelle May, MD, Am I Hungry?, P.L.L.C.; Wilma Wooten, MD, University of California; Kathleen Zelman, MPH, RD, LD, WebMD.*

*The views expressed are those of the author and do not necessarily reflect the official positions or policies of the American Dietetic Association.*

## Debunking Dairy Food Myths (continued)

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important for growth and development, than to avoid milk altogether.

**MYTH:** 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 nine essential nutrients 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 for consumers to meet the Dietary Guidelines recommendation for three servings of milk and milk products each day based.

**MYTH:** 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.
- Hormones are present naturally in all milk. While some dairy farmers use a supplemental hormone for their cows, the safety of this use has been affirmed and reaffirmed by leading national and international health and agricultural organizations over the past 15 years.
- 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:** "Raw" milk (unpasteurized) is safer and more natural than pasteurized milk.

**FACTS:**

- Consuming unpasteurized or "raw" milk presents severe food safety risks which is why the dairy industry, FDA and the Centers for Disease Control strongly support

pasteurization. Pasteurization kills the bacteria responsible for diseases such as listeriosis, salmonellosis, campylobacteriosis, typhoid fever, tuberculosis, diphtheria, and brucellosis, as well as other bacteria.

- Since its introduction more than a century ago, pasteurization has been recognized around the world as an essential tool for ensuring that milk and dairy products are safe. A simple, effective method to kill bacteria without affecting the taste or nutritional value of milk, pasteurization typically involves heating raw milk to 161.5 degrees for 15 seconds and then immediately cooling it.
- Most fluid milk in the United States is required to be pasteurized, and if it's not pasteurized, it's required to be labeled as raw milk. Most domestic fresh and soft cheeses are also pasteurized. Hard cheeses aged longer than 60 days do not require pasteurization.

**MYTH:** 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 help promote 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—low-fat, fat-free, flavored, organic and lactose-free products—make dairy foods a convenient source of essential nutrients. Dispelling myths that surround dairy is an important step in encouraging healthy eating as defined by the *Dietary Guidelines*.

For a referral to a registered dietitian and for additional food and nutrition information visit

**WWW.EATRIGHT.ORG**

*What's your most valuable source of good nutrition?  
Registered Dietitians are the experts when it comes to helping people eat well and stay healthy. An RD has the knowledge and expertise to develop an eating plan to meet the needs of all individuals.*



**American Dietetic Association**

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