

Wholesome Dairy Products

There are few things that I enjoy more than a drink of cold milk. A triple-decker ice cream or a cheese covered pizza is also hard to beat. I was raised in a home where the health benefits of dairy products were repeated often, so some would consider me biased. I admit to often becoming a bit defensive when I hear some of the myths about dairy products that tend to surface in the popular culture.

Most States, including Utah, have created a Dairy Council, funded entirely by a mandatory assessment to dairy farmers. No taxpayer monies are used. The Council conducts year-round advertising, public relations programs, promotions, issues management initiatives, industry communications and public education campaigns directed mainly toward consumers. These activities explain the nutritional benefits of including dairy products in the diet and underline dairy foods' status as one of the most heavily tested, closely monitored and safest food products available. Most are familiar with advertising campaigns the Council has utilized over the years such as: "Milk – It Does a Body Good," "got milk?" "3-A-Day of Dairy." and "Fuel Up to Play 60".

Another purpose of the Dairy Council is to underscore the economic contribution the dairy industry makes to local and state economies. Dozens of local dairy farms and well managed Cache County dairy processing facilities make a substantial contribution to the economic well-being of our valley. Furthermore, the quality of the dairy products we produce has never been better. Because of stringent quality control requirements at the farm and with dairy processors, consumers can be confident of the quality and safety of dairy products. Our scores with milk quality have never been better. It's a compliment to all who are involved in any way with producing and processing delicious and nutritious dairy products.

Dairy foods such as milk, cheese and yogurt are foundational foods in healthy eating patterns. They contribute important shortfall nutrients, including calcium, vitamin D and potassium. Low-fat and fat-free dairy foods are part of current Dietary Guidelines for Americans (DGA) and American Heart Association (AHA) dietary recommendations. A growing body of research indicates that dairy food consumption is associated with multiple health benefits, including lower blood pressure and reduced risk of type 2 diabetes.

Research continues to support current DGA recommendations to consume three servings of low-fat or fat-free dairy foods for children and adolescents ages 9 years and older. This nutrient-rich diet, along with adequate physical activity, helps achieve peak bone mass. An abstract from the American Academy of Pediatrics reports that "by the year 2020, one-half of Americans older than 50 years will be at risk for osteoporotic fractures. Once thought to be an inevitable part of aging, osteoporosis is now considered to have its roots in childhood, when preliminary preventative efforts can be initiated. In fact, bone mass attained in early life is thought to be the most important modifiable determinant of lifelong skeletal health." Unfortunately, osteoporosis is not restricted to adults. Osteoporosis, the bone-thinning disease that affects mostly older adults, is starting to impact a much younger population. Although bone loss can be

slowed after age 30, it cannot be reversed or restored. Reaching peak bone mass at a young age is associated with reduced risk osteoporosis later in life.

Studies show that calcium intake has declined steadily in the last several years, especially as children approach adolescence. In 1945, Americans consumed four times more milk than soft drinks. Today, consumers drink much more soda than milk and many believe that this is one of the factors contributing to our obesity crisis. Many children are also skipping breakfast or not eating evening meals at home, thus missing opportunities to drink milk and consume dairy products. The USDA's Food Guidance Pyramid recommends dairy as a priority for healthy living.

Another common myth blames milk for weight gain, but research shows an interesting relationship between weight management and calcium intake. Controlled trials in overweight adults suggest that consuming 3 servings of milk, yogurt, or cheese each day as part of a calorie-reduced diet increases body weight loss without causing loss of muscle mass. Calcium in dairy products appears to improve metabolism and plays an important role in achieving and maintaining a healthy weight.

If Americans simply met the current federal calcium recommendations, we could milk every cow in the United States and still would not be able to stay ahead of demand. At this point, dairy producers are discouraged with depressed milk prices on the farm, Economists tell us we are overproducing. It appears that producers and consumers would all be better off if we all drank more milk, ate more yogurt, and enjoyed more nutrient-rich dairy products. Interested readers can learn more at <http://nationaldairyCouncil.org>.

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