

Wholesome Dairy Products

There are few things that I enjoy more than a cold drink of 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 always become 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 Commission funded entirely by a mandatory assessment to dairy farmers. No taxpayer monies are used. The mission of the Dairy Commission is to promote dairy products within the state, to educate the public about dairy products and to communicate the economic contribution the dairy industry makes to local and state economies. One-hundred plus dairy farms and well managed dairy processing facilities in Cache County make a significant contribution to the economic well-being of our valley.

The Commission 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 Commission has utilized over the years such as: "Milk – It Does a Body Good," "got milk?" and "3-A-Day of Dairy."

Studies show that calcium intake has declined steadily during the last several years – especially as children approach adolescence. In 1945, Americans consumed four times more milk than soft drinks. By 1997, consumers drank much more soda – 2.5 times more than milk. Perhaps that statistic helps explain our obesity crisis. Many children are also skipping breakfast or not eating evening meals at home – missing opportunities to drink milk. The USDA's Food Guidance Pyramid recommends dairy as a priority for healthy living.

A recent study published in the *Journal of the American Academy of Pediatrics* shows that only 30% of teenage boys and just 10% of teenage girls are meeting the current daily recommendations for calcium – a critical mineral in bone health. Ironically, calcium needs are highest during adolescence. Dr. Nancy Krebs, a co-author of the study, reports that up to 50% of total bone density is achieved during adolescence and if an individual misses that window, it's very difficult to fully compensate later. 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.

While other sources of calcium exist (calcium-fortified orange juice, green vegetables, and calcium supplements), dairy products offer additional important nutrients needed for bone health – including vitamin D, magnesium, potassium, phosphorus, and protein. The calcium in dairy products is also better absorbed and utilized in the body.

A study in the *Archives of Internal Medicine* found that men who included more dairy products in their diets, especially low-fat dairy, may have a lower risk of developing type 2 diabetes. Other studies suggest that consumption of calcium-rich dairy foods lowers the risk of hypertension or reduces high blood pressure. A 2004 report in an issue of the *Journal of the National Cancer Institute* reports that increased consumption of milk and calcium were related to lower risk of colon cancer– the third most common cancer worldwide.

A 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. The 2005 Dietary Guidelines for Americans states that “adults and children should not avoid milk and milk products because of concerns that these foods lead to weight gain.” On the contrary, calcium in dairy products seems to improve metabolism and plays an important role in achieving and maintaining a healthy weight.

Dr. David McCarron has said; “If Americans simply met the current federal calcium recommendations, we could milk every cow in the United States as fast as possible and we still would not be able to stay ahead of demand.” At this point, we have 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 drink more milk. Readers may enjoy exploring diet recommendations at www.MyPyramid.gov