

# DAIRY provides many health benefits

Did you know that humans are the only adult animal species that continues to consume “milk” through dairy products. While

most animals wean off of their mother’s milk after infancy, humans across the globe have been consuming products produced

by cow, sheep or goat milk for thousands of years. And the benefits can be numerous.

## Human body grows to accept milk

Although dairy doubters are quick to mention that it is not “natural” for humans to consume milk products into adulthood and that the body is not designed to digest the sugars and proteins in dairy, others are saying that centuries of farming have led to the evolution of human genes so that dairy products can be included in the diet.

According to a study published in 2013 in the journal *Nature*, archaeologist Peter Bogucki was excavating a Stone Age site in the fertile plains of central Poland in the 1970s when he came across various artifacts. One seemed to be an early pottery strainer used in cheese-making. The pottery was studied, and milk proteins were found on it.

As farming replaced hunting and gathering in many areas of the world, it’s surmised that the human body slowly evolved to

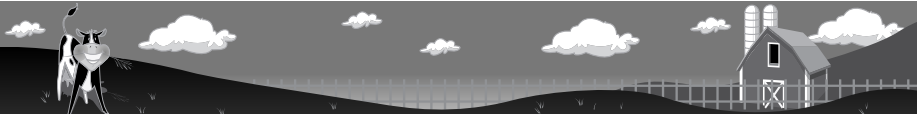
tolerate milk into adulthood, especially if it was fermented, such as in cheese or yogurt. Several thousand years later, it’s believed that a genetic mutation spread through Europe that gave people the ability to produce lactase — the enzyme necessary to digest the lactose sugar in dairy — and drink milk. Many people who retain the ability to digest milk can trace their ancestry to Europe, according to a group of scientists brought together to work on a multidisciplinary project called LeCHE (Lactase Persistence in the early Cultural History of Europe). There are other dairy pockets from West Africa, the Middle East and South Asia.

## Dairy’s present-day benefits

Today we know that dairy is an important source of nutrients at all ages and stages of growth. Southeast United Dairy Industry Association, Inc. says that dairy is a great source of protein, calcium, carbohydrates, phosphorus, potassium, and vitamins A, D, B12, riboflavin, and niacin.

The U.S. Department of Agriculture says that the calcium in dairy products is used for building bones and teeth and in maintaining


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