



The many health benefits of dairy

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Many people recall the slogan “Milk, it does a body good.” But as different health fads have emerged since that slogan was first uttered, including an increased availability of dairy alternatives, dairy has been somewhat pushed aside, leaving many people to question if it is a friend or foe.

According to Vasanti Malik, a nutrition research scientist with the Harvard T.H. Chan School of Public Health, dairy isn’t necessary for maintaining optimal health for humans. However, it is one of the best and easiest ways to get ample amounts of vitamin D, protein and calcium, each of which keeps vital organs, muscles and bones functioning properly. Here’s a deeper look at dairy in the average diet.

What is dairy?

Dairy products consist of a variety of products that are from

mammals, including cows, goats and sheep. These include milk, yogurt, cheese, kefir, ice cream, butter, ghee, cream, cream cheese, sour cream, whey products, and casein. Dairy products are often categorized as “regular,” “whole,” “reduced fat,” “low-fat,” or “skim.” These characterizations indicate the fat content in a given item.

Nutritional benefits of dairy

Dairy products are nutrient-dense and great sources of protein, calcium and vitamins. Protein builds and repairs muscle tissue; carbohydrates in milk provide energy; and calcium and phosphorous can help strengthen bones and teeth. Vitamin D helps promote the absorption of calcium. Dairy also contains riboflavin, vitamin A, pantothenic acid, potassium and niacin. One eight-ounce serving of milk contains the recommended daily values of these nutrients based on guidelines from

the U.S. Food & Drug Administration.

Bone health

Dairy protein and calcium may play critical roles in bone health and density, helping to reduce the risk for osteoporosis, states the Dairy Alliance. Eating and drinking foods rich in calcium may offset a possible protein-calcium loss that occurs with aging, thus protecting bone health.

Heart health benefits

Some people avoid dairy because of perceptions that it is bad for cardiac health. A report presented at the 2018 Congress of the European Society of Cardiology that looked at 20 studies involving around 25,000 people found no association between the consumption of most dairy products (including whole fat varieties) and cardiovascular disease. The only exception was milk, but the results showed one would have to drink almost a liter of

milk a day for a higher risk of cardiovascular disease. Still, the American Heart Association recommends adults choose fat-free or low-fat dairy products whenever possible. Also, a 2018 study published in the British Journal of Nutrition found men who ate plenty of fermented dairy products like yogurt and cheese had a smaller risk of coronary artery disease than men who ate less.

Additional benefits of dairy include a reduced risk of childhood obesity and an improvement in body composition and weight loss during energy restriction in adults, according to a 2016 report in the Journal of Food and Nutrition Research.

Dairy provides many health benefits. People concerned about their overall health should work recommended dairy servings into their daily diets.

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Dairy dietary guidelines

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The value of a well-balanced diet is undeniable. An eating plan that includes foods from the various food groups ensures individuals get an assortment of healthy vitamins, minerals and nutrients. Certain foods may need to be avoided by individuals with pre-existing conditions, but those without such restrictions can follow dietary guidelines from the United States Department of Agriculture and Health and Human Services. Those guidelines include various recommendations regarding dairy consumption.

- The USDA notes that the amount of dairy an individual needs depends on the person’s age, sex, height, weight, and level of physical activity. In addition, women who are pregnant or breastfeeding will have different dairy consumption needs than women who are not expecting or breastfeeding. Individuals can speak with their physicians to determine how much dairy they should consume, and they also can utilize the MyPlate Plan at myplate.gov. The MyPlate Plan allows users to enter information specific to them (i.e., weight, height, age, etc.) so they can learn how much dairy they should be consuming.

- USDA guidelines encourage most individuals to consume three servings of dairy per day. The organization’s “Dietary Guidelines for Americans 2020-2025” recommend that adults consume the equivalent

of three cups of dairy per day. The guidelines indicate that children should consume 2 1/2 cups of dairy per day, with that number increasing to three cups around the time children reach age 9.

- Low-fat or fat-free dairy options are recommended. Low-fat or fat-free products can quell common concerns about dairy products, including that they’re high in fat, calories and sodium. The

organization American Bone Health™ reports that low-fat or fat-free dairy products provide more calcium, potassium, vitamin A, and vitamin D per calorie.

Dairy is a vital component of a well-balanced, nutritious diet. Individuals with more questions about dairy can consult with their physicians and/or visit www.dietaryguidelines.gov to learn more.

Photos of the Green County Fair Beef Cattle Show will be in the June 29 issue of the Record-Herald.

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