Dairy Foods: MYTHS & FACTS

For Health and Nutrition Professionals

Sound scientific evidence supports the **2015 Dietary Guidelines' recommendations of 3 daily servings of dairy** to ensure that Americans are getting the important nutrients they need, including **calcium, vitamin D,** and **potassium.**

Misconceptions regarding dairy foods can lead to their needless elimination from diets. As health professionals, you can positively shape your clients' food choices by clearing up these myths and communicating accurate nutrition information.

Myth: **People who are sensitive to lactose should avoid dairy foods completely.**

Facts:

- The 2015 Dietary Guidelines suggest that avoiding dairy altogether may lead to deficient intake of several key nutrients.
- Encourage lactose-free milk as a substitution. Lactose-free cow's milk has the same vitamins and minerals as regular cow's milk, just without the lactose.
- Rather than avoiding dairy entirely, recommend trying milk in smaller amounts or with meals. Also recommend natural cheeses and yogurts with live active cultures. These products naturally have very low lactose levels, making them more easily digestible.

Myth: **Milk contains hormones that are bad for consumers' health.**

Facts:

- Milk naturally contains a small amount of growth hormone (Bovine Somatotropin, or BST), which is produced in the cow's pituitary gland.
- BST is species-specific; it is produced in cows and is not biologically active in humans. Any trace amounts of BST that remain after pasteurization are broken down into inactive proteins by enzymes in the intestinal tract, just like any other dietary protein.
- The FDA approved the use of the synthetic version of this protein, called rbST, that some farmers use to increase milk production. The FDA and other leading health organizations have affirmed and reaffirmed that milk from cows treated with rbST is just as safe and wholesome as milk from untreated cows.

Myth: **It's easy to get calcium without consuming dairy products.**

Facts:

- According to the U.S. Department of Agriculture, dairy foods provide about 75% of Americans' calcium. It's difficult to get the calcium needed without dairy in the diet.
- Alternative beverages are not nutritionally equal to milk. Most do not contain the same 9 essential nutrients as milk, requiring the consumption of additional foods or supplements.
- Calcium-fortified beverages may contain the same amount of calcium as cow's milk, but due to the low bioavailability of calcium in these products, the body absorbs less of that calcium, requiring more to get the same benefits.

With the variety of choices now available, it's easier than ever for your clients to get their **3 servings of dairy every day.**

EVIDENCE SHOWS THAT REGULAR CONSUMPTION OF DAIRY PRODUCTS IS LINKED TO:

improved bone health, lower blood pressure, and reduced risk of cardiovascular disease and type 1 diabetes.

Myth: All milk contains antibiotics except organic milk.

Facts:

- All milk is carefully tested for antibiotics. Any milk that tests positive is disposed of immediately and does not enter into the food supply.
- There is no scientific evidence to suggest that organic dairy products are safer or healthier than conventional dairy products.
- On conventional dairy farms, a cow receiving antibiotic treatment for an illness is separated from the herd until its milk tests negative for all antibiotics.
- If a tested sample of milk is not perfect, the entire batch is thrown out, and the farmer is required to pay for the full tanker of milk. This is a strong incentive for farmers to keep their milk free of antibiotics.
- Milk and dairy products are among the most stringently regulated foods in the U.S.
- Strict government standards ensure that both regular and organic milk are wholesome, safe, and nutritious. Both contain the same nutrients that make dairy an important part of a healthy diet.

Myth: Genetically modified organisms (GMOs) used in animal feed make milk unsafe to drink.

Facts:

- GMO refers to any plant that has had a gene introduced to its DNA to develop a specific feature. GMO crops can allow for pest resistance, increased yield, and decreased pesticide use.
- Hundreds of scientific studies support the safety of GMO foods, and the scientific community unanimously supports these findings.
- There is no evidence to support a difference in the nutrition profile of animal products from GMO-fed animals, nor are there any negative health effects on the animal.
- Neither fluid milk nor the cows producing milk are genetically modified.

Myth: Raw milk has health benefits not found in pasteurized milk.

Facts:

- Pasteurization is a process that kills bacteria by heating raw milk to at least 161 °F for more than 15 seconds and then rapidly cooling it.
- In addition to helping extend milk's shelf life, harmful pathogens are destroyed, including Salmonella, Campylobacter, E. coli O157:H7, and Listeria.
- Pasteurization does not reduce milk's nutritional value or cause lactose intolerance or allergic reactions.
- Consuming raw milk is not safe and can increase the risk of foodborne illnesses. These are especially dangerous for people with weakened immune systems, older adults, pregnant women, and children.

When it comes to nutrition, people should listen to health and nutrition professionals. At St. Louis District Dairy Council, we take our responsibility as The Nutrition Education People seriously. We're proud to spread **science-based knowledge** to local communities, bridging the gap between local dairy farmers and consumers every day.

Looking for more information? Visit us at:

WWW.STLDAIRYCOUNCIL.ORG/RESOURCES

St. Louis District Dairy Council

THeNutritionEducationPeople