



Dairy dilemmas fueled by headlines

I've seen friends post information on social media saying dairy foods are bad for you. Is this hype or for real?

Despite some negative press, dairy products still get a thumbs-up from the nutrition community, particularly low-fat and fat-free varieties.

But that didn't stop recent headlines from warning things such as "Drinking too much milk could kill you." This particular round of news stories was based on a Swedish study and have added fuel to dairy denunciations from groups as disparate as plant-food-loving vegan diet advocates to meat-loving Paleo diet proponents.

In the study, researchers looked at dietary questionnaires completed by 61,000 Swedish women in the late 1980s and in 1997, and 45,000 Swedish men in 1997, and investigated health outcomes in 2010. They found that higher reports of milk consumption were not associated with lower risk of bone fractures and were associated with higher rates of death — hence the headlines that resulted.

But even the study's authors said their results should be interpreted cautiously and shouldn't be used for dietary recommendations. Critics went further, pointing out that the study didn't differentiate between full-fat and low- or nonfat milk, and actually found that consumption of cheese, yogurt and other fermented dairy products was associated with a reduced risk of bone fractures. And

there's always concern about long-term studies that draw conclusions from dietary information taken at a single point in time.

That said, milk consumption is problematic for people who are lactose-intolerant. People with this condition have trouble digesting the type of sugar in milk and suffer bloating, cramps, diarrhea or nausea after drinking milk. It's estimated that 30 to 50 million Americans are lactose intolerant to some extent, with very high rates among certain populations, including Asians, African-Americans, Latinos and Native Americans.

Despite the concerns, the majority of the nutrition community defends dairy as being an important part of an overall healthful diet. There's just too much scientific evidence that supports the link between consumption of dairy products and bone health, and there are additional compelling indications that dairy has other health benefits, as well. Besides being high in calcium, dairy offers many nutrients, including vitamin D, riboflavin, vitamin B12, phosphorus, potassium, vitamin A, selenium, magnesium and zinc.

So, experts say, if the choice is between soda or another sugary drink and milk — take the milk.

Chow Line is a service of Ohio State University's College of Food, Agricultural, and Environmental Sciences and its outreach and research arms, Ohio State University Extension and the Ohio Agricultural Research and Development Center. Send questions to Chow Line, c/o Martha Filipic, 2021 Coffey Road, Columbus, OH, 43210-1043, or filipic.3@osu.edu.



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