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Dairy: 6 Reasons You Should Avoid It at all Costs

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GOT MILK?

These days, it seems like almost everybody does. Celebrities, athletes, and even former president Clinton's head of Health and Human Services, Donna Shalala, are all proud to wear the white "milk mustache." After all, everyone knows that you need milk to be healthy ...

Dairy *is* nature's perfect food — but only if you're a calf.

If that sounds shocking to you, it's because very few people are willing to tell the truth about dairy. In fact, criticizing milk in America is like taking on motherhood, apple pie, or baseball. But that's just what I'm about to do.

Based on the research and my experience practicing medicine, I typically advise most of my patients to avoid dairy products completely. I like ice cream just as much as the next person, but as a scientist I have to look honestly at what we know. In today's blog I will explore many of the documented ill-effects of dairy, and give you six reasons you should avoid dairy at all costs.

The Reason I Have Problems with the USDA Food Pyramid

I'm aware that my advice to avoid dairy flies in the face of the new, "up-to-date" food pyramid from the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA). The USDA's pyramid recommends drinking 3 glasses of milk a day. What's wrong with that? Well, for one thing, it's not a recommendation that's based on strict science.

Some of the "experts" who helped create the pyramid actually work for the dairy industry, which makes the US Department of agriculture's recommendations reflect industry interests, not science or our best interests.

In fact, Walter Willett, M.D., Ph.D — the second-most-cited scientist in all of clinical medicine and the head of nutrition at Harvard's School of Public Health — is one of the pyramid's most vocal critics. He's even called its guidelines "udderly ridiculous." That's not something a Harvard scientist says lightly.

But Dr. Willett is right. The pyramid just isn't based on key scientific findings about health. Just take a look at some of the pyramid's recommendations — and why I disagree with them.

1. Consume a variety of foods within and among the basic food groups while staying within your body's energy needs.

Sounds sensible — but which food groups? If you choose dairy, meat, fats, and carbohydrates, the “perfect” meal could be a cheeseburger, milkshake, and fries with ketchup (potatoes and tomatoes are the two top vegetables consumed in America). Generic advice like that is pretty meaningless and potentially harmful.

2. Control your caloric intake to manage body weight.

Again, that sounds good, but as I wrote in my book *UltraMetabolism*, even the best-trained nutritionists and dietitians can't come close to correctly estimating their own caloric intake in a day. Also consider this: Is it okay to consume all of your calories from cola or ice cream as long as you stay within my caloric needs? Of course not. So this is more useless advice.

3. Increase intake of fruits and vegetables, whole grains, and nonfat or low-fat milk products.

Well, fruits, veggies, and whole grains are great. Milk — not so much. I'll get back to that in a minute.

4. Choose carbohydrates wisely.

Who could argue with that? But how do they define “wisely”? The real advice here should be to cut down sugar intake from 185 pounds per person per year (what we currently consume) to less than a pound, avoid flour products (except as a treat), and stick to whole-food carbohydrates like vegetables, fruit, whole grains, beans, nuts, and seeds.

5. Choose to prepare food with little salt.

That's not bad advice. But it doesn't make sense if most of what you eat is packaged or processed foods that you don't actually prepare. For most Americans who eat half of their meals outside their homes, this isn't helpful. A better recommendation would be to avoid packaged, processed, canned, prepared, and fast foods (unless you know exactly how they are made).

6. If you drink alcoholic beverages, do so in moderation.

Sounds good — but if you're usually drinking two bottles of wine a night, then one seems like moderation! I think a better suggestion is to limit your alcohol consumption to half a drink a day or 3 glasses a week (the amount that seems to have the most health benefit).

7. Don't eat unsafe foods.

Of course you shouldn't leave your egg salad out in the hot sun or toss your salad with hands that just handled raw chicken coated with salmonella. But the food pyramid guidelines don't mention pesticides, hormones, antibiotics, or genetically modified foods, despite scientific evidence of their harm. Shame on the USDA!

You can see now why I have big problems with the food pyramid! Its guidelines try to sound sensible — while still protecting the interests of the food industry, the agriculture industry, and all

of the lobbyists paying for the elections of the Congress. That way everybody's happy ...

But I'm not, and you shouldn't be either. The public just isn't served by this watered down, confusing, and useless pyramid. Worse, some of the recommendations are downright harmful —like the one to drink more milk and dairy products.

The Truth about Dairy

According to Dr. Willett, who has done many studies and reviewed the research on this topic, there are many reasons to pass up milk, including:

- 1. Milk doesn't reduce fractures.** Contrary to popular belief, eating dairy products has never been shown to reduce fracture risk. In fact, according to the Nurses' Health Study dairy may increase risk of fractures by 50 percent!
- 2. Less dairy, better bones.** Countries with lowest rates of dairy and calcium consumption (like those in Africa and Asia) have the lowest rates of osteoporosis.
- 3. Calcium isn't as bone-protective as we thought.** Studies of calcium supplementation have shown no benefit in reducing fracture risk. [vitamin D](#) appears to be much more important than calcium in preventing fractures.
- 4. Calcium may raise cancer risk.** Research shows that higher intakes of both calcium and dairy products may increase a man's risk of prostate cancer by 30 to 50 percent. Plus, dairy consumption increases the body's level of [insulin-like growth factor-1](#) (IGF-1) — a known [cancer](#) promoter.
- 5. Calcium has benefits that dairy doesn't.** Calcium supplements, but not dairy products, may reduce the risk of colon cancer.
- 6. Not everyone can stomach dairy.** About 75 percent of the world's population is genetically unable to properly digest milk and other dairy products — a problem called lactose intolerance.

Based on such findings, Dr. Willett has come to some important conclusions:

- **Everybody needs calcium** – but probably not as much as our government's recommended daily allowance (RDA).
- **Calcium probably doesn't prevent broken bones.** Few people in this country are likely to reduce their fracture risk by getting more calcium.
- **Men may not want to take calcium supplements.** Supplements of calcium and [vitamin D](#) may be reasonable for women.
- **Dairy may be unhealthy.** Advocating dairy consumption may have negative effects on health.

If all that isn't enough to swear you off milk, there are a few other scientific findings worth noting. The Federal Trade Commission (FTC) recently asked the UDSA to look into the scientific basis of the claims made in the “milk mustache” ads. Their panel of scientists stated the truth clearly:

- Milk doesn't benefit sports performance.
- There's no evidence that dairy is good for your bones or prevents osteoporosis — in fact, the animal protein it contains may help cause bone loss!
- Dairy is linked to prostate cancer.
- It's full of saturated fat and is linked to [heart disease](#).

- Dairy causes digestive problems for the 75 percent of people with lactose intolerance.
- Dairy aggravates [irritable bowel syndrome](#).

Simply put, the FTC asked the dairy industry, “Got Proof?” — and the answer was NO!

Plus, dairy may contribute to even more health problems, like:

- [Allergies](#)
- Sinus problems
- Ear infections
- Type 1 diabetes
- Chronic constipation
- Anemia (in children)

Due to these concerns, many have begun to consider raw milk an alternative. But that isn't really a healthy form of dairy either ...

Yes, raw, whole, organic milk eliminates concerns like pesticides, hormones, antibiotics, and the effects of homogenization and pasteurization — but to me, these benefits don't outweigh dairy's potential risks.

From an evolutionary point of view, milk is a strange food for humans. Until 10,000 years ago we didn't domesticate animals and weren't able to drink milk (unless some brave hunter-gatherer milked a wild tiger or buffalo!).

If you don't believe that, consider this: The majority of humans naturally stop producing significant amounts of lactase — the enzyme needed to properly metabolize lactose, the sugar in milk — sometime between the ages of two and five. In fact, for most mammals, the normal condition is to stop producing the enzymes needed to properly digest and metabolize milk after they have been weaned.

Our bodies just weren't made to digest milk on a regular basis. Instead, most scientists agree that it's better for us to get calcium, potassium, protein, and fats from other food sources, like whole plant foods — vegetables, fruits, beans, whole grains, nuts, seeds, and seaweed.

So here is my advice for dealing with dairy.

5 Tips for Dealing with Dairy

- **Don't rely on dairy for healthy bones.** If you want healthy bones, get plenty of exercise and supplement with 2,000 IU of [vitamin D](#) daily.
- **Get your calcium from food.** These include dark green leafy vegetables, sesame tahini, sea vegetables, and sardines or salmon with the bones.
- **Try giving up all dairy.** That means eliminate milk, cheese, yogurt, and ice cream for two weeks and see if you feel better. You should notice improvements with your [sinuses](#), post-nasal drip, [headaches](#), [irritable bowel syndrome](#), energy, and weight. Then start eating dairy again and see how you feel. If you feel worse, you should try to give it up for life.
- **If you can tolerate dairy, use only raw, organic dairy products.** I suggest focusing on fermented products like unsweetened yogurt and kefir, occasionally.
- **If you have to feed your child formula from milk, don't worry.** The milk in infant formula is hydrolyzed or broken down and easier to digest (although it can still cause allergies). Once your child is a year old, switch him or her to real food and almond milk.

Still got milk? I hope not! Remember, dairy is **not** crucial for good health. I encourage you to go dairy-free and see what it does for you.

Now I'd like to hear from you ...

Do you agree or disagree that dairy is bad for you?

Have you experienced any problems consuming dairy?

What changes — for better or worse — have you experienced if you've tried eliminating dairy?

Please let me know your thoughts by leaving a comment below...


To your good health,

Mark Hyman, MD

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-  *jennifer* says:
[April 30, 2011 at 10:23 pm](#)

Is there any literature to show that perhaps homogenized milk has altered molecular structure which could play a role in increasing cholesterol, triglycerides and thus cardiovascular disease. Or perhaps it is the inflammatory response caused by the inability of the adult body to manage dairy? That is, if the molecules of fat are broken down to remain suspended, perhaps becoming a trans fat(??) then is it not plausible that the fat molecules could be more easily absorbed through the villi and into the blood stream and thus cells to cause inflammation and other problems??

hope this is clear.

thanks looking forward in hearing from you as this has been on my mind for awhile,

jennifer

RN and clinical nutritionist

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