

DAIRY FOODS: FACTS & MYTHS

For Health and Nutrition Professionals

Sound scientific evidence supports the 2010 Dietary Guidelines' recommendation of 3 daily servings of dairy to ensure that Americans are getting the important nutrients they need, including calcium, vitamin D, and potassium. Evidence also shows that regular consumption of dairy products is linked to improved bone health, lower blood pressure, and reduced risk of cardiovascular disease and type 2 diabetes. And, with the variety of choices now available, it's easier than ever for your clients to get their 3 servings of dairy every day.

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 2010 Dietary Guidelines suggest that avoiding dairy altogether may lead to deficient intake of several key nutrients.
 - 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 *Organic milk is healthier than conventional milk.*

- FACTS**
- There is no scientific evidence to suggest that organic dairy products are safer or healthier than conventional dairy products.
 - 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.
 - Organic milk must meet criteria defined by the US Department of Agriculture. These criteria do not dramatically differ from the standards that are in place for the rest of the dairy industry.*



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 and other leading health organizations have concluded that milk produced by cows treated with hormones and milk produced by untreated cows is exactly the same.
 - There is no scientific evidence to support the claim of a link between the early onset of puberty in children and the use of hormones in milk production. Researchers propose that the higher rate of childhood obesity may be responsible for earlier maturation.



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

FACTS

- According to the US 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.



MYTH *Today's dairy cows are treated like milk machines.*

FACTS

- Dairy farmers depend on cows that are healthy and well-cared-for to produce pure, wholesome milk for their livelihood.
- Farmers employ professional nutritionists to develop balanced and nutritious diets for their cows. Diets include hay, grains, protein sources, vitamins, and minerals.
- Dairy cows receive regular veterinary care, including periodic check-ups, preventative vaccinations, and prompt treatment of illnesses.



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.
- On conventional dairy farms, a cow receiving antibiotic treatment for an illness is separated from the herd until their milk tests negative for all antibiotics.
- During 2010, the dairy industry conducted nearly 4 million tests on milk to detect antibiotic or other drug residues during processing; fewer than 0.03% tested positive.
- 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 US.

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 everyday.

**Visit the USDA website for information on organic practices at dairy farms: www.usda.gov/AMSV1.0/NOP
References for the facts found on this sheet can be found at: www.stldairyCouncil.org/references*

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