

Milk Myths

Submitted by: Adrienne Allin, Dietetic Intern
Dianne Oickle, MSc, RD
Registered Dietitian/Public Health Nutritionist
Leeds, Grenville & Lanark District Health Unit

Recently in the media, many anti-milk campaigns have surfaced. You may be questioning the safety of drinking cow's milk. What are some of these recent claims against milk and what are the facts?

Myth – Milk causes acne

Fact – The idea that foods *cause* acne is false. Certain foods such as milk, chocolate, french fries, cola, peanuts and iodine-containing foods such as shellfish, have all been accused of *causing* acne. Scientific research has not found a link between diet and acne. A number of factors working together, such as genetics, skin type, hormones and pollution are believed to be the cause.

Myth – Milk causes obesity

Fact – Drinking milk does not lead to obesity. No single food causes weight gain. Food can lead to weight gain when eaten in excess of your energy needs. If you consume more energy (calories) than you burn, weight gain will result. Milk products come in a range of fat contents (% MF) to suit any lifestyle. All milk has the same amount of calcium regardless of its fat content.

Myth – Milk contains hormones that are harmful to humans

Fact – Canada does not allow the use of growth hormones to increase milk production in cows. Therefore, no added growth hormones are found in any Canadian milk or milk products. There are also no antibiotic residues in any Canadian milk or milk products. Natural hormones from the cow do pass into the milk - however they have no effect on humans when consumed and are digested like any other protein. Bovine Growth Hormone (BGH), also known as recombinant Bovine Somatotropin (rBST), is currently used in the United States to increase milk production in cows. rBST is not present in milk that is produced in Canada.

Myth – Milk causes heart disease

Fact – No one food *causes* heart disease. Eating any foods that are rich in saturated fat can increase risk of heart disease. Foods high in saturated fat include meats, baked products, butter, lard, coconut, palm oils, and high fat dairy products. The best way to reduce your risk of heart disease is to eat a balanced diet that is low in fat, include regular physical activity, and reduce the stress in your life.

Myth – Milk causes allergies

Fact – No one food *causes* an allergy. Milk allergy is a reaction of the immune system to the protein in milk. True milk allergies are not very common - only about 1% to 3% of children have a cow's milk allergy and they usually outgrow this by age three. In adults the rate is even lower. The major factor that triggers a food allergy is family history of food allergies. Drinking milk will not *cause* a milk allergy or allergies of any other kind.

Myth – Milk robs the body of calcium

Fact – A common myth is that high protein foods cause the body to lose calcium. In fact, most food sources of protein such as milk and milk products, meat, fish and beans contain phosphorus, which helps prevent the loss of calcium in urine. Because of the phosphorus and other compounds in milk and milk products, calcium is highly absorbed, with very little negative influence from protein. The overall result is that the body retains more calcium from milk and milk products with minimal calcium loss in the urine.

Myth - Dietitians promote milk because they are all paid by the dairy industry.

Fact - This is simply not true. Registered Dietitians do not receive kickbacks or bonus money from dairy farmers of the dairy industry to promote milk. Registered Dietitians make recommendations based on sound scientific evidence rather than relying on opinions or a "good guess". The science clearly shows that milk products supply many valuable nutrients and can be part of a healthy way of eating.

Myth – Milk is important for kids, but adults do not need to drink it.

Fact – Milk and milk products are important at all ages in order to get the calcium we need. Different amounts are required at different ages. One cup of 1% milk contains 317 mg calcium. Children need to drink about 3 cups of milk per day, and teenagers and adults need to drink 4 cups of milk per day to get enough calcium. That means that for a family of four (2 adults, 2 children), one 4 litre bag of milk will last about one and a half days.

If you choose not to drink milk, you still need to consume the same amount of calcium. There are other foods and beverages you can drink to get the calcium you need. Contact a Registered Dietitian to help you choose the healthiest foods to supply calcium.

March is Nutrition Month! Be sure you are getting your nutrition information from reliable and accurate sources. If you would like more information about calcium intake and milk, please call the Leeds, Grenville and Lanark District Health Unit's Health Action Line at 1-800-660-5853(345-5685) and ask to speak to a Registered Dietitian.

Calcium recommendations are from the current Dietary Reference Intakes (nutrient recommendations of Canada and the United States).