

HOW HEALTHY IS MILK DRINKING?

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There are many studies available which have attempted to correlate affluence in a society, consumption of food and beverage, and mortality from certain diseases. Coronary artery disease in prosperous countries has been measured. The male coronary mortality in Finland, which is the highest of any country, is about 8 times that of the lowest which is Japan. Comparing the 4 leading countries—Finland, Ireland, UK and Sweden—heart disease mortality is 4 times higher than the low mortality group, which includes Spain, France, Portugal, and Japan. There is a high correlation for heart disease death and drinking whole milk, eating milk proteins, and ingesting milk fats excluding those in butter and cheese. Given the fact that there is a strong correlation between milk drinking and heart disease, it makes us question the wisdom of this habit after the end of the major growth phase in humans.

Milk and other dairy products are important in our diets because of the calcium that they furnish. In discussing calcium intake, we first look at developing countries where an intake of 200-500 milligrams per day is seen. This is probably the same as was present in Europe in the 1800s when the incidence of rickets due to calcium deficiency was high. The largest increase in calcium in the Western diet came with increasing use of cow's milk, which contains 4 times as much calcium as human milk. In prosperous countries usually about one-half to one quart of milk each day is the average intake, and this contains about 300-600 milligrams of calcium. The mortality rate from coronary disease with yogurt and cheese consumption is much lower than it would be with the consumption of whole milk. In the '50s, it was customary to treat gastric ulcer patients with large quantities of milk, until a very high mortality from coronary disease was observed. With the high calcium level achieved by drinking milk, hardening of the arteries with deposition of calcium into the plaque areas increased the risk for coronary disease.

Arterial calcification due to the ingestion of dietary calcium from cow's milk could be preventable. It might be done by eliminating either the drinking of milk or removing lactose from the milk which would help reduce the absorption of calcium in these people. There is a lot of available information about this complex subject, and it appears as if the best course is for adults not to drink milk and to choose another beverage. Most people drink milk because of doctors' orders or a personal taste for it. Non-milk drinkers may dislike it, think it costs too much, or feel that it may be fattening. In one doctor's study, half of his adult patients were drinking 7 or more glasses of milk per week whereas about one-tenth took 4 glasses or less per week.

One study from Denmark shows a decline in the consumption of milk and dairy products. They also noted that calcium from supplements can be just as effectively absorbed as the calcium from milk and dairy products. Also it was noted that calcium absorption from

kale and broccoli is as efficient as it is from milk. However, calcium is well absorbed from milk and dairy products including cheese. In pre-menopausal women, there may be a benefit to their bones. In post-menopausal women, calcium intake from milk or dietary supplements does help postpone bone loss or prevent osteoporosis.

There has been a lot of discussion about the presence of hormones, antibiotics, and even pesticides being present in milk sold in our grocery stores. Both estrogens and androgens can be increased in concentration in cow's milk and may have an effect on growing teenagers. For example, acne in teenagers may be tied to milk consumption because of the extra androgens in the milk. These hormones are not present in organically produced milk.

Milk is an excellent source of potassium, calcium, phosphorus, riboflavin, vitamin D, and even B-12. Dairy foods have been noted in some studies to reduce the effects or severity of osteoporosis, hypertension, kidney stones, obesity, and Type II diabetes. Milk consumption is related to an increase of Type I diabetes and prostate cancer. A relationship between milk consumption and Type I diabetes in children was first noted about 20 years ago. When cow's milk is introduced earlier in life, it activates a gene in some children which causes this disease. Milk is related to an increase in prostate cancer, but the incidence of cancer of the colon and rectum is reduced.

Dr. Colin Campbell, author of *The China Study*, notes that there is little evidence that shows that boosting your calcium intake with dairy will prevent fractures. Dr. Walter Willett, who co-authored *The Nurses Health Studies*, found that women with the highest calcium consumption from dairy products actually had more fractures than women who drank less milk. He also found that calcium from plant-based diets was probably a healthier source. At this time, about 83% of the calcium in our diets comes from dairy foods. Cow's milk has been linked to childhood maladies such as colic, nasal congestion, asthma, and recurrent upper respiratory infections.

From a logical point of view, even though we might think of cow's milk as a perfect food, we do know that cows don't drink cow's milk, and calves stop drinking milk between the ages of 6 and 8 months. Human beings are the only species that drink the milk from other animals. Because milk drinking in adults can cause allergies, ear infections, heart disease, and prostate cancer, it probably is best not to drink milk after the onset of the teenage years.