

Dairy's Role in Healthy Weight

Frequently Asked Questions on
National Dairy Council, June 2007

Where can I get more information on dairy and a healthy weight to help educate my patients and clients?

The dairy industry is committed to bringing sound science to health professionals and the public under the guidance of the USDA. In line with the Dietary Guidelines, the industry's current marketing and nutrition education initiatives are focused on educating Americans about the importance of milk and milk products to improve overall diet quality and bone health and to help maintain a healthy weight. More information is available at www.nationaldairyCouncil.org, www.3aday.org and www.thinkaboutyourdrink.com.

What does the science say about dairy's role in weight management?

A growing body of research suggests that enjoying three servings of milk, cheese or yogurt each day as part of a nutrient-rich, balanced diet may help promote a healthy weight. At least 45 observational studies exploring dietary intake patterns and body weight in various population groups indicate that those who consume greater amounts of dairy foods tend to weigh less than those who consume less dairy. In addition, clinical trials of overweight and obese adults showed that those who followed reduced-calorie diets and increased their dairy intake to three servings a day achieved better weight loss and body fat loss results than those who cut calories and consumed inadequate amounts of dairy foods and calcium.

A full compilation of peer-reviewed, published research is posted on National Dairy Council's (NDC) Website at www.nationaldairyCouncil.org/NationalDairyCouncil/Healthyweight/Science.htm.

How does the dairy and weight management connection work?

One plausible biological mechanism is based on the role that dietary calcium, and potentially dairy protein, may play in fat break down, production and storage. Diets that are inadequate in calcium have been shown to increase a key calcium-regulating hormone, which in turn increases intracellular calcium concentrations in human fat cells and results in increased fat storage. Conversely, adequate calcium intake decreases levels of this hormone, leading to decreases in intracellular calcium and less fat being stored in fat cells which may result in weight loss.

Another proposed mechanism is that dairy intake promotes weight loss because the calcium in dairy binds fat and decreases its absorption from the intestinal tract. Other researchers have suggested that the positive effect of protein on satiety, or the psychological feeling of fullness, contributes to dairy's beneficial effect on weight.

What do the Dietary Guidelines say about dairy foods?

The health benefits of dairy foods have been documented by decades of nutrition research. This body of science led to the Dietary Guidelines recommendation for three servings of low-fat and fat-free milk or equivalent milk products daily as part of a healthy diet.

The Dietary Guidelines recognizes that people who consume more dairy foods have better overall diets, consume more nutrients and have improved bone health. Specific to dairy and weight, it states that adults and children should not avoid milk and milk products because of concerns that these foods lead to weight gain. In addition, low-fat/fat-free milk or milk products, whole grains and fruits and vegetables are “food groups to encourage,” meaning Americans should include more of them in their diets to help meet nutrient recommendations.

What did the Federal Trade Commission (FTC) recently say about dairy and weight loss?

The United States Department of Agriculture, in conversation with the FTC, asked the dairy industry to adjust any weight-loss messages to focus on what the 2005 U.S. Dietary Guidelines/MyPyramid say about dairy and healthy weight. The Dietary Guidelines states that adults and children should not avoid milk or milk products because of concerns that these foods lead to weight gain.

###