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DAIRY Nutrition Digest

SCIENTIFIC NEWSLETTER ON NUTRITION AND HEALTH

The «*Dairy Nutrition Digest*» is EDA's quarterly scientific newsletter providing the latest science-based information on dairy-related nutrition and health topics. Scientific articles are summarized in user friendly language for a broad audience.

Consumers understand but do not use nutrition information on labels

A recent UK study looking into nutrition knowledge, and the use and understanding of nutrition information on food labels found that consumers exposed to basic nutrition information on food labels understand them, but may not have the motivation to use labels to make healthy choices.

The study investigated the use of nutrition information on food labels and its understanding based on in-store observations in three major UK retailers, in-store interviews and questionnaires that were filled out at home and returned.

The results showed that only 27% of respondents looked for a nutrition label when making a selection in the store but that understanding of nutrition labels was very high (70-90%). The use of nutrition information depended on the product category and was highest for yoghurt, a product category that already has a healthy image, and lowest for confectionery, i.e. indulgence-type products. As regards nutrition knowledge, the study showed that younger people and those in the higher social grades had the best understanding of nutrition information.

The study concluded that the level of understanding is much higher than the usage and that usage was a question of interest in healthy eating whereas understanding was a question of nutrition knowledge. The authors question whether there has been too much concentration on understanding and too little on motivation of healthy eating. Nutrition information can help consumers compare products but this does not mean that it will be used. Labelling policy needs to be embedded in a broader nutrition policy, the researchers say.

Grunert KG, Wills JM, Fernández-Celemín L. Nutrition knowledge, and use and understanding of nutrition information on food labels among consumers in the UK. Appetite. 2010 Oct;55(2):177-89.

Eating more protein may help maintain weight loss

A lot of research is going on around the best diet for weight control. In a large European study, researchers found that eating a diet high in protein and reduced in glycemic index helps overweight people to better maintain weight loss.

Overweight adults from eight European countries who had previously lost body weight eating a low-calorie diet were given different test diets where the protein content as well as the glycemic index (measure of the effects of carbohydrates on blood sugar levels) of the foods given differed. The best results gave the diet with low glycemic index foods and high protein which provided around 22% of total energy as protein (the current recommendation is 10-15%). This study showed that overweight people that ate high protein foods (acc. to the EU claims regulation foods that provide 20% of their energy from protein such as milk, yoghurt and cheese) and foods with a lower glycemic index (such as most fruits and vegetables, whole grains and milk) were more likely to finish the study and therefore did better in maintaining their weight loss. The researchers concluded that this type of diet appears to be ideal for the prevention of weight regain.

In the context of the current discussions around new EU food labelling rules, this study is another argument why the inclusion of protein in the mandatory nutrition declaration would health benefit the many overweight European consumers.

Larsen TM, Dalskov SM, van Baak M, Jebb SA, Papadaki A, Pfeiffer AF, Martinez JA, Handjieva-Darlenska T, Kunešová M, Pihlsgård M, Stender S, Holst C, Saris WH, Astrup A; Diet, Obesity, and Genes (Diogenes) Project. Diets with high or low protein content and glycemic index for weight-loss maintenance. *N Engl J Med.* 2010 Nov 25;363(22):2102-13.

Go Ahead...Drink your Milk!

Several studies with research published all over the world in 2010 brought new evidence on the health benefits of dairy and highlight why daily consumption of dairy foods is important.

A very recent meta-analysis that looked at 17 studies from Europe, USA and Japan found no link between the consumption of regular or low-fat dairy products and any increased risk of heart disease, stroke or total mortality. The study even found that drinking three glasses of milk per day may lead to an 18% decreased risk of cardiovascular disease.

Other studies looked at the effects of intake of calcium (which is high in dairy products) and showed that higher calcium intakes delivered benefits for heart disease and weight loss. One specific study found that overweight men and women with the highest dairy calcium intake lost 38% more weight than those with the lowest dairy calcium intake.

All those studies support and justify the current recommendations of eating several portions of dairy products per day.

Global Dairy Platform: Go Ahead...Drink your Milk! Snapshot of international published research in 2010 reveals continued evidence for dairy's health benefits, December 2010

Dairy fat may help not harm

Scientists at the Harvard School of Public Health and collaborators from other institutions have identified a natural substance in dairy fat that may substantially reduce the risk of type 2 diabetes.

While health experts generally advise reducing full-fat dairy products, a compound found in dairy fat may substantially reduce the risk of type 2 diabetes. The compound, trans-palmitoleic acid, is found in milk, cheese, yoghurt, and butter. It is not produced by the body and thus only comes from the diet.

In this study, scientists examined data from a study that followed 3,736 adults from 1992 to 2006. They found that those adults with the highest blood levels of trans-palmitoleic acid were exposed to the lowest risk of type 2 diabetes. The 20 per cent with the highest levels were found to have a 60 per cent lower risk. The authors said that "this represents an almost three-fold difference in risk of developing diabetes among individuals with the highest blood levels of this fatty acid".

In contrast to the types of industrially produced trans fats found in partially hydrogenated vegetable oils, which have been linked to higher risk of heart disease, trans-palmitoleic acid is almost exclusively found in naturally occurring dairy and meat trans fats, which in prior studies have not been linked to higher heart disease risk.

The researchers explain that trans-palmitoleic acid may underlie epidemiological evidence in recent years that diets rich in dairy foods are linked to lower risk of type 2 diabetes and related metabolic abnormalities. Health experts generally advise reducing full-fat dairy products, but trans-palmitoleic acid is found in dairy fat and this study adds to the growing evidence of positive health effects of dairy products.

Mozaffarian D, Cao H, King IB, Lemaitre RN, Song X, Siscovick DS, Hotamisligil GS. Trans-palmitoleic acid, metabolic risk factors, and new-onset diabetes in U.S. adults: a cohort study. *Ann Intern Med.* 2010 Dec 21