Dr. John Ferguson presents...Debunking the Dairy Dogma

Studies suggest that milk isn't the "health kick" it's advertised to be.

http://www.icpa4kids.org/research/articles/childhood/dairydogma.htm

"Got Milk?" The ad phrase turned pop-mantra does as much disservice to English grammar as it does to dietary science - an ill-worded, seemingly-unassailable, anecdotal justification for overindulgence. Boy, talk about sacred cows.

According to the USDA, the nation's 7.79 million dairy cows produce 150 billion pounds of milk every year, contributing to the manufacture of 1.4 billion pounds of butter, 8.6 billion pounds of cheese and 1.5 billion gallons of ice cream. The average American consumes over 600 pounds of dairy products every year. The Dairy Board, the USDA and the FDA think that's not enough, encouraging Americans to drink at least three glasses of milk daily.

But Dr. Robert M. Kradjian, Breast Surgery Chief of California 's Seton Medical Center , thinks three glasses is too much. In fact, he thinks you shouldn't drink any milk at all. After systematically reviewing the archives of medical and scientific journals, his findings were "slightly less than horrifying." Think milk does a body good? Think again.

"None of the authors spoke of cow's milk as an excellent food, free of side effects and the 'perfect food' as we have been led to believe by the industry. The main focus of the published reports seems to be on intestinal colic, intestinal irritation, intestinal bleeding, anemia, allergic reactions in infants and children as well as infections such as salmonella. More ominous is the fear of viral infection with bovine leukemia virus or an AIDS-like virus as well as concern for childhood diabetes. Contamination of milk by blood and white (pus) cells as well as a variety of chemicals and insecticides was also discussed.

Among children the problems were allergy, ear and tonsillar infections, bedwetting, asthma, intestinal bleeding, colic and childhood diabetes. In adults the problems seemed centered more around heart disease and arthritis, allergy, sinusitis, and the more serious questions of leukemia, lymphoma and cancer." Here's just a taste of the dairy dilemma Dr. Kradjian uncovered.

Let's begin with cancer. A 1989 study from the Roswell Park Cancer Institute reported that people drinking whole milk three or more times daily had a 2-fold increase in lung cancer risk when compared to those never drinking whole milk. Another Roswell Park study reported that drinking more than one glass of whole milk daily increases a woman's risk of ovarian cancer by 3.1 times.

These findings were corroborated in a 2000 Harvard Medical School study, tracking 80,000 nurses, which found that even skim milk consumption (the culprit being lactose, a milk sugar, not milkfat) increases women's risk of ovarian cancer by 66%. The implications are worldwide. A 1989 Harvard Medical School study, which analyzed data from 27 countries, found a significant positive correlation between ovarian cancer and per capita milk consumption.

Dr. William Harris, the Medical Director of the Kaiser-Permanente Vegan Lifestyle Clinic, performed a similar study. Comparing World Health Organization cancer mortality statistics in 33 countries, he found a significant correlation between breast cancer mortality and milk consumption.

Statistically speaking, the countries with the highest rates of breast cancer (Denmark , Norway , Holland , Sweden , Finland and Uruguay) also have the highest rates of dairy consumption. Uruguay ? Yes, Uruguay has third highest rate of milk consumption and the third highest rate of breast cancer. A subsequent survey of Uruguyan women found that high intakes of whole milk and Gruyere cheese were associated with significant increased risk of breast cancer.

Dr. Harris identifies a different culprit. He hypothesizes: "Estrogens and insulin-like growth factor (IGF-1) in cow's milk stimulate breast cancer."

IGF-1 is a hormone common to both humans and cows. While IGF-1 doesn't cause cancer, it stimulates its growth. Furthermore, animal fat and protein elevate insulin levels and increase IGF-1 production in the body, exacerbating its effect.

IGF-1 has been clinically found to accelerate the growth of breast cancer cells. The medical journal Lancet published a Nurses' Health study by Harvard scientists, reporting that pre-menopausal women with high levels of IGF-1 had up to a seven-fold increased breast cancer risk. These findings were corroborated in a March 1999 report by the Scientific Committee of European Union on "Veterinary Measures relating to Public Health."

A 1990 Stanford University study reported that IGF-1 promotes the growth of prostate cells, too. And, in 1997, international researchers reported further epidemiological evidence that IGF-1 levels correlate to prostate cancer risk. The Roswell Institute reported that men who drank three or more glasses of whole milk daily had a relative risk 2.49 times higher for cancer. A January 1998 report by Harvard researchers confirmed the link between IGF-1 blood levels and prostate cancer risk -- higher than for any other known risk factor -- in some studies, four times the risk in men. Overall, in surveys of clinical literature, "For prostate cancer, epidemiologic studies consistently show a positive association with high consumption of milk (and) dairy products."

Research has linked IGF-1 to colon cancer, too. Plus, researchers at the National Institutes of Health report that IGF-1 also plays a central role in the progression of many childhood cancers, small cell lung cancer, melanoma, and cancers of the pancreas. Further scientific studies have found links from high levels of IGF-1 to diabetes, acromegaly (gigantism, characterized by excessive growth of the head, face, hands, and feet) and gynecomastia (growth of breasts in men).

The milk connection: bovine milk contains high levels of IGF-1, which is resistant to pasteurization. And while IGF-1 is usually broken down in digestion, IGF-1 in bovine milk is resistant to stomach acids. According to a 1995 report in the Journal of Endocrinology, casein, the most abundant protein in bovine milk, prevents IGF-1 from breaking down in the stomach. Instead, IGF-1, once in the intestines, can pass directly into the bloodstream, largely due to the presence of the milk protein casein - the strengthening component of Elmer's glue. (Incidentally, lab animal studies at Cornell have identified casein as a carcinogen.)

To make matters worse, cows treated with FDA-approved recombinant bovine somatotropin (BST or rBGH), a hormone genetically engineered by bio-tech giant Monsanto, have even higher levels of IGF-1 -- 25-70% higher in EU Scientific Committee studies. Entire books have been dedicated to enumerating the dangers of dairy-borne rBGH, but, in the interest of brevity, let's just stick to plain milk. There's plenty still to consider.

For instance, let's look at bovine leukemia (BLV) and bovine immunodeficiency virus (BIV). Allegedly, BLV is found in more than 60% of dairy cows, and about 80% of dairy herds, in the United States . In one study of randomly collected raw milk, BLV was recovered from two-thirds of the samples. Another study showed an average 40% of US beef herds and 64% of US dairy herds as infected with BIV. In lab studies, virtually all animals exposed to BLV develop leukemia. And, yes, humans can catch BIV.

Theoretically, both viruses are killed during pasteurization (although some evidence suggests pasteurization makes them even more dangerous). However, note the inherent flaws in dairy production. In April of 1985, a large, modern, Chicago milk-processing plant accidentally "cross connected" raw and pasteurized milk, resulting in a salmonella outbreak in 150,000 Chicago-area dairy consumers (we'll get back to raw milk later). These same people were, theoretically, exposed to BLV and BIV. Coincidentally, the dairy states Iowa , Nebraska , South Dakota , Minnesota and Wisconsin have a

statistically higher incidence of leukemia than the national average. In fact, nationwide and worldwide, leukemia is more common among dairy-consuming populations.

What about all of milk's purported health benefits? The Dairy Board claims that milk can be effective in battling osteoporosis. But, statistically, countries with the dairy intake (United States , Sweden , Israel , Finland , and the United Kingdom) also have the highest incidence of osteoporosis. China , which is virtually dairy-free, since most Chinese are lactose intolerant, has among the lowest incidences of osteoporosis. The hard evidence: a 12-year Harvard Nurses' Health Study of 78,000 women found that those who got more calcium from milk broke more bones than those who got less calcium in their diets.

According to Dr. Julian Whitaker, editor of Health & Healing, "Osteoporosis results from calcium loss, not insufficient calcium intake. And dairy products, because of their high protein content, promote calcium loss. Studies examining the incidence of osteoporosis have found that high consumption of dairy products is associated with high rates of osteoporosis. If you want strong bones, don't drink milk."

Where should you get your calcium from? The over-simplified answer is: where cows get their calcium from - green, leafy vegetables. What makes green vegetables so vital is chlorophyll, the center atom of which is magnesium. What needs to be present to properly metabolize calcium? Magnesium (as well as phosphorous, Vitamin D and fiber). As it turns out, dairy is woefully lacking in magnesium. (Note: the very best source of magnesium is nuts.) Also, vegetables and legumes are alkaline and don't deplete the body's calcium stores like acid-causing animal proteins.

The evidence, though controversial, is difficult to refute. A telling report published in the American Journal of Clinical Nutrition surveyed 57 clinical studies on dairy products and bone health. After excluding technically-flawed studies, researchers found that 71% of the scientifically valid research showed that dairy products had either no bone-building benefits or actually did harm.

Surely kids can benefit from drinking milk? Not so, say clinical studies. The results are undeniable and altogether unexpected. We'll start from day one. In a 1992 British control study of premature infants researchers found a significant advantage of mother's milk over cow's milk-based formula. Children were followed up for over 8 years. Adjustments were made to allow for differences in mothers' education and social class. Result: according to the Weschler Intelligence Scale for Children, the children fed breast-milk averaged 8.3 IQ points higher.

The American Academy of Pediatrics intelligently advises parents to not give their children dairy milk before their first birthday. Doctor Frank Oski, former Chief of Pediatrics at Johns Hopkins University Hospital elaborates, "It is my thesis that whole milk should not be fed to the infant in the first year of life because of its association with iron deficiency anemia, occult gastrointestinal bleeding, and various manifestations of food allergy." His conclusion outsteps the AAP: "Why give it at all - then or ever? In the face of uncertainty about many of the potential dangers of whole bovine milk, it would seem prudent to recommend that whole milk not be started until the answers are available. Isn't it time for these uncontrolled experiments on human nutrition to come to an end?"

Many leading pediatricians contend that milk allergies, very common in children, can cause sinus problems, diarrhea, constipation and fatigue. They are a leading cause of chronic ear infections. Milk allergies are also linked to behavior problems in children and to the rise of childhood asthma.

It has also been suggested that childhood milk consumption contributes to the development of Type-I diabetes. A 1990 Canadian study found a "significant positive correlation between consumption of unfermented milk protein and incidence of insulin dependent diabetes mellitus in data from various countries. Conversely a possible negative relationship is observed between breast-feeding at age 3 months and diabetes risk."

According to a report by Finnish researchers and the Hospital for Sick Children in Toronto , Finland has "the world's highest rate of dairy product consumption and the world's highest rate of insulin dependent diabetes. The disease strikes about 40 children out of every 1,000 (in Finland) ... Antibodies produced against the milk protein during the first year of life, the researchers speculate, also attack and destroy the pancreas in a so-called auto-immune reaction, producing diabetes in people whose genetic makeup leaves them vulnerable."

Pediatric milk critics link bovine leukemia concerns with the fact that half of the cancers children get today are leukemias. Then there is the issue of hormones. Increased consumption of dairy products, already high in IGF-1, and now containing rBGH, may be contributing to the dramatic drop of the average age of puberty of American girls - to as low as to age 6 for black girls and age 7 for whites.

Charles Attwood, renowned pediatrician and author of Dr. Attwood's Low Fat Prescription for Kids has been quite outspoken against childhood dairy consumption. His concern: saturated fat, "which is one of the primary contributors to heart disease." Attwood explains: "Dairy products are the most immediate source of saturated fat for children. And thanks to, a high consumption of dairy products, we now have 40 million children with elevated cholesterol levels in the United States ... We know that, statistically, one out of two children will die from heart disease as adults. According to the 25-year Bogalusa Heart Study done by Louisiana State University in New Orleans , (coronary) fatty deposits were found in children as early as age 3. And by age 12, 70 percent of these children were found to have these potentially deadly deposits."

No, he doesn't think milk is important for kids' bones. "The milk-calcium-bone density myth has been created and perpetuated by the intense lobbying of the dairy industry throughout the lifetimes of most adults living today," says Attwood. "The true connection between milk and strong bones isn't exactly what the dairy industry has been telling us all these years."

But none of this is news. Dr. Benjamin Spock, the late guru of pediatrics, put it plainly, "Cow's milk in the past has always been oversold as the perfect food, but we are now seeing that it isn't the perfect food at all and the government really shouldn't be behind any efforts to promote it as such."

None-the-less, a major component of government subsidized school lunch programs (thanks, in part, to the School Milk Pilot Test) are surplus milk and cheese collected by the USDA. Law requires the USDA to buy any surplus of butter, cheese, or non-fat dry milk. The USDA's Commodity Credit Corporation purchased 650 million pounds of nonfat dry milk and 8 million pounds of cheese in 2002 - between the Farm Security and Rural Investment Act of 2002's Milk Price Support Program and the Milk Income Loss Contract, spending over $2 billion in subsidies and price supports for the bloated US dairy market. Today, the USDA has 1.3 billion pounds of excess nonfat dry milk in government storage.

A few more facts to consider: Fifty years ago an average cow produced 2,000 pounds of milk per year. Today, they average that amount per month. The top producers give 50,000 pounds a year. How is that accomplished? Forced feeding plans, specialized breeding, drugs, hormones and antibiotics. In tests by the Centre for Science in the Public Interest, 38% of milk samples in 10 cities were found to be contaminated with sulfa drugs or other antibiotics. Why the antibiotics? Artificial hormones give rise to mastitis, an udder infection. Milk might have been an important dietary staple centuries ago. But today it hardly resembles the food that nourished our forbears.

Nor is it consumed in the same manner. Traditionally, dairy products were cultured or fermented, as yogurt, cheese, curds or whey - partly for storage, partly for nutrition, since fermentation breaks down casein and lactose, and maximizes beneficial bacteria and digestive enzymes. Only in the industrialized West is uncultured milk consumed by the glass (a

19th century urban phenomena). More traditional fermented beverages are kefir, Russian koumiss, Middle Eastern laban, Icelandic syra, Finnish piima or Norwegian kjaeldermelk.

Even raw milk is, in some ways, preferable to today's ultra-pasteurized, homogenized variety. Raw, unprocessed milk contains higher levels of nutrients, plus the very bacteria necessary for casein and lactose breakdown. It even may lower childhood asthma risks. Unfortunately, factory farming results in such tainted milk from diseased herds, their raw product is inedible, plagued with pesticides, viruses and bacteria. Smaller, properly-raised, healthy herds from family farms don't have those issues, yet the sale of raw dairy products (still legal in Europe) is illegal in most US states. The Real Milk project of The Weston A. Price Foundation hopes to change that, but don't wait for your legislators to jump on the bandwagon.

It will, instead, take consumers educating themselves about the dangers of dairy, listening to clinicians like Kradjian, luminaries like Spock, and investigative iconoclast like stalwart dairy foe Robert Cohen, Executive Director of the tactfully-named Dairy Education Board, editor of the website notmilk.com, and author of Milk: The Deadly Poison. Cohen, a former psychoneuroendriconological researcher, actually went on hunger strike in 2001 to publicize milk dangers. His new book Milk A-Z provides an exhaustive compendium of arguments against milk, backed by an encyclopedia of clinical references. Cohen sums up his stance: "By eliminating milk, we can eliminate the single most disease causing factor for all humanity."

Yet, the Milk Industry Foundation's spokesman Jerome Kozak maintains, "I still think that milk is the safest product we have." The $27 billion dairyindustry's $165.7 million 2003 marketing plan (primarily targeted to children ages 6 to 12 and their mothers, in the words of Dairy Management, Inc., "to guide school-age children to become life-long consumers of dairy products") hopes to reiterate such mis-information, silence its critics and whitewash the warning signs of a nutritional nightmare.

If the contrary clinical evidence doesn't convince you to reconsider your dairy intake, perhaps common sense will. No other animal consumes the milk of a different species. And of all mammals, only humans -- primarily Caucasians -- continue to drink milk beyond babyhood. Even still, 20 to 40% of Caucasians are lactose intolerant. Orientals are about 60% lactose intolerant. And blacks are up to 90% lactose intolerant as adults. Which makes one wonder: just who is able to drink 3 glasses of milk daily? The better question is: who would want to?

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A Return to Real Milk

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