

A heart-felt need for dairy food

16 September 2014



Researchers have found a little dairy is beneficial and a lot is unnecessary.

A daily small serve of dairy food may reduce the risk of heart disease or stroke, even in communities where such foods have not traditionally formed part of the diet.

A study of nearly 4000 Taiwanese, led by Emeritus Professor Mark Wahlqvist from Monash University's Department of Epidemiology and Preventive Medicine and the Monash Asia Institute, considered the role increased consumption of [dairy foods](#) had played in the country's gains in health and longevity.

"In a dominantly Chinese food culture, unaccustomed to dairy foods, consuming them up to seven times a week does not increase mortality and may have favourable effects on stroke," Professor Wahlqvist said.

Cancer and cardiovascular disease are the leading causes of death among Taiwanese. When Professor Wahlqvist's study began in 1993, there was little apparent concern about dairy foods, in contrast to a current belief that they may be harmful to health and in particular raise the risk of cancer.

The study showed such fears to be unfounded.

"We observed that increased [dairy consumption](#) meant lower risks of mortality from [cardiovascular disease](#), especially stroke, but found no significant association with the risk of cancer," Professor Wahlqvist said.

Milk and other dairy foods are recognised as providing a broad spectrum of nutrients essential for human health. According to the study findings, people only need to eat small amounts to gain the benefits.

"A little is beneficial and a lot is unnecessary," Professor Wahlqvist said.

"Those who ate no dairy had higher blood pressure, higher [body mass index](#) and greater body fatness generally than other groups. But Taiwanese who included dairy food in their diet only three to seven times a week were more likely to survive than those who ate none."

For optimal results, the key is daily consumption of dairy foods – but at the rate of about five servings over a week. One serving is the equivalent to eight grams of protein: a cup of milk, or 45 grams of cheese.

Such quantities rarely cause trouble even for people considered to be lactose intolerant, Professor Wahlqvist said.

The study, which was published in the *Journal of the American College of Nutrition*, also involved researchers from the National Health Research Institutes and National Defence Medical Centre in Taiwan.

Provided by Monash University

APA citation: A heart-felt need for dairy food (2014, September 16) retrieved 27 November 2022 from <https://medicalxpress.com/news/2014-09-heart-felt-dairy-food.html>

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