Eight reasons why milk matters for health

With so many milk alternatives on the market, it can be easy to forget why we love and enjoy milk in the first place! Below are some of the key reasons why milk can continue to play an important role in your diet everyday:

1. **Number one source of calcium**
Milk is packed with calcium – it is the largest contributor of calcium in the Australian diet, an essential nutrient for building and maintaining strong bones throughout life! To get the same amount of calcium as one 250 ml glass of milk you would need to eat 32 Brussels sprouts, 21 cups of raw chopped spinach, 11 cups of diced sweet potato, 6 cups of shredded green cabbage, 5 cups of cooked broccoli or 1 cup of dry roasted almonds.

2. **Milk’s a nutrient powerhouse**
In addition to calcium, milk is packed with more than 10 essential nutrients that we need to maintain general health and wellbeing, such as protein, riboflavin, phosphorous, potassium, magnesium. Zinc and vitamins A, and B12.

3. **Milk can help reduce the risk of some pretty serious diseases**
The latest scientific evidence shows milk and dairy food consumption has a beneficial impact on many areas of health. The evidence statements in the Australian Dietary Guidelines show consumption of milk, cheese and yogurt is linked to a reduced risk of heart disease, stroke, hypertension, type 2 diabetes, metabolic syndrome and colorectal cancer – some of the main causes of death in Australia: That’s actually six reasons!

4. **Milk can help you lose weight**
Research shows eating 3-4 serves of milk, cheese and yogurt every day is not linked to weight gain. And if you are trying to lose weight, studies have shown these foods can actually help dieters lose more weight. A review of clinical trials showed people who consumed at least three serves of dairy foods per day as part of a calorie controlled diet lost more weight, particularly body fat than diets without dairy.

5. **Milk is nature’s sport recovery drink**
Milk naturally provides both fluid and electrolytes (sodium and potassium) to assist with rehydration. The electrolyte concentration of milk is similar to conventional sports drinks and studies have now shown that milk is a more effective drink for rehydration than sports drinks or water.

6. **Milk matters for muscles**
Milk also contains high quality proteins (whey and casein) that can help repair muscles post workout and promote lean muscle growth. In a study of healthy, untrained men, those who drank skim milk after exercise gained more muscle and lost more body fat at the end of a 12-week training program than those who drank a soy protein beverage or a carbohydrate-only beverage. All three beverages had the same amount of calories. A second study found similar results for women. The females who drank 500ml of skim milk one hour after lifting weights gained more lean muscle and lost more fat than those who had a carbohydrate-based drink.

7. **Even people with lactose intolerance can enjoy milk**
For those who have been diagnosed with lactose intolerance, the good news is they do not have to completely eliminate milk and dairy foods. Most people can usually tolerate up to 12 g of lactose (the amount in one glass of milk) without symptoms, particularly if it is consumed with other food. Many dairy foods are naturally low in lactose. For example, hard cheeses such as Parmesan, Cheddar and Swiss contain virtually zero lactose. Yogurt is also well tolerated because the healthy bacteria present digest much of the lactose. Lactose-free milks are available and contain similar nutrients to regular milk.

8. **It’s a proven winner for teeth**
Cow’s milk is known for its protective teeth properties and ability to harden teeth thanks to its natural protein casein and available calcium and phosphate. A recent study by the University of Melbourne confirmed this when they compared the effects of milk and soy beverages on tooth decay. Participants who drank the soy beverage saw a worsening of teeth erosion and a decrease in tooth mineral content which is needed to keep them strong. The opposite effect was seen in those who drank the cow’s milk.

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4. Hartman et, al. (2007) Consumption of fat-free fluid milk following resistance exercise promotes greater lean mass accretion than soy or carbohydrate consumption in young novice male weightlifters. AJCIN 86:373–381