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## Nix the Nonfat Milk, Chuck the Lowfat Cheese?

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Plenty of evidence supports eating full-fat dairy.

By Sheila Buff



Just about every piece of dietary advice out there recommends that you consume lowfat — or nonfat — versions of milk, yogurt, cheese, and any other dairy food you choose. It seems that no one questions whether there is good enough reason to remove the natural fat that occurs in cow's milk. Have you ever wondered if it might be healthier to eat and drink dairy products with all the fat left in?

The fat in dairy foods, even reduced-fat versions, is roughly 50 to 60 percent saturated fat, which is supposed to be bad for your heart. However, a growing number of experts say this is nothing more than a mistaken interpretation of the science. In a 2010 analysis of all the research on the subject, scientists wrote: "...There is no significant evidence for concluding that dietary saturated fat is associated with an increased risk of [coronary heart disease or cardiovascular disease]." Also, a 16-year prospective study of more than 1,500 Australian adults, published in 2010, showed that those who ate the most full-fat dairy had the lowest risk of death from cardiovascular disease. There may be other factors in animal foods — the only foods that contain saturated fat — that do contribute to increased disease risk, but they're not understood well enough yet.

If only half of dairy fat is the saturated kind, what kind is the rest? Dairy fat contains lots of oleic acid (the stuff that makes olive oil so healthy), along with a type of fat called conjugated linoleic acid (CLA) that may help with weight loss. Recent studies strongly suggest that something — possibly the CLA — in dairy fat does indeed help with weight management.

To take just one example, in a study of nearly 20,000 Swedish women approaching menopause, those who regularly drank at least one serving a day of whole milk or ate at least one serving of full-fat cheese gained less weight over a nine-year period than women who didn't regularly consume dairy or who consumed only low-fat dairy products. In fact, the women who had a daily serving of full-fat cheese gained 30 percent less weight than the women who didn't eat cheese or who ate reduced-fat products. Other research has shown

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similar findings. Bottom line? Full-fat dairy may help — not hinder — weight control.

Finally, there are the issues of flavor and what food scientists call “mouth feel.” Reduced-fat and non-fat (skim) milk is thin and watery, with less milk flavor. Ditto for low-fat yogurt, cottage cheese, and sour cream. And almost everyone agrees that low-fat cheeses are seriously deficient in the flavor and texture departments (plus they don’t melt well).

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