



Eat dairy to your heart's content!

Yogurt and other dairy products may not be dangerous to heart health as previously thought.

During the 1st Global Summit on the Health Effects of Yogurt, the attendees heard that people, particularly those who have had a heart attack in the past or anyone with existing heart disease, have traditionally been warned off yogurt, cheese and milk because the saturated fat in them is considered bad for the cardiovascular system.

But recent studies have shown that dairy products are actually mildly beneficial to the heart, with a 6% reduction in cardiovascular disease risk.

'There are health professionals who think that dairy is very bad for you,' Dr Arne Astrup told the meeting, 'but that doesn't seem to be the case. In fact, fermented dairy products, such as yogurt and cheese, seem to have a protective effect on the heart.'

He said that meta-analyses¹ have shown that dairy products in the diet reduce blood pressure, possibly due to their calcium content. This could explain why dairy foods, in particular yogurt, have a beneficial effect on cardiovascular risk factors.

He also suggested that current assumptions that high-fat dairy products, as a source of saturated fat, are bad for heart health may have to be revised in future. Foods like dark chocolate, yogurt and cheese contains other nutrients that interacts with saturated fat so the effect on heart health cannot be predicted solely by the content of saturated fat.

Dr. Astrup said the key issue may prove to be what saturated fats in the diet are replaced by, pointing out that recent studies have suggested that refined (high glycemic index) carbohydrates and n-

6 polyunsaturated fats may actually increase cardiovascular risk if they replace saturated fat in the diet.

He cited a study which showed that when saturated fat in the diet was replaced with n-6 linoleic acid from safflower oil it increased cardiovascular disease, coronary heart disease and total mortality by 70%.

'Here we have a situation in which the study group with more saturated fat in their diet was the most healthy one!', Dr Astrup said. 'It looks as if we might now have to revise the view that you should always choose a low-fat dairy alternative because saturated fat is bad for your heart', he added.

Dr Astrup concluded that yogurt is a healthy food that provides nutrients and which is linked with reduced risk of weight gain and obesity and cardiovascular diseases.

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