

Dairy Month celebrated in June

Written by Holyoke Enterprise

June is Dairy Month, and while the benefits of including fruits and vegetables in diets are widely known, the medical benefits of dairy are often overlooked. The following are a handful of ways that dairy products—like low-fat milk, cottage cheese and yogurt—can make a nutritious and beneficial addition to one's diet.

—Dairy packs a protein- and calcium-laden punch. One cup of nonfat yogurt can provide as much as one-third of the daily recommended calcium intake and nearly 20 percent of the daily recommended protein intake. Though dairy products like ice cream don't pack the same nutritious punch as yogurt, healthier fare like reduced-fat cheese and skim milk can go a long way toward meeting one's daily intake of protein and calcium.

—Dairy is a great source of vitamin D. In addition to providing sufficient calcium and protein, dairy also helps men, women and children boost their vitamin D. That's especially important in the winter months when people tend to get less exposure to the sun. Exposure to the sun is a natural way to boost vitamin D, but the shorter days and colder weather of winter can make it hard to get sufficient vitamin D during that time of year.

Dairy products like low-fat milk can boost vitamin D, which can improve bone health and, according to recent research, might help reduce cancer risk.

—Dairy may help lower blood pressure. Men and women with high blood pressure might benefit from including more dairy in their diets. In a study of 5,000 adults, Spanish researchers found that those who reported consuming the most low-fat dairy products were more than 50 percent less likely to develop high blood pressure than those who consumed less low-fat dairy.

Though researchers are not certain as to the reason behind low-fat dairy products' impact on blood pressure, some theorize that their calcium and protein content are likely behind the benefit.

—Dairy benefits bones. Dairy has long been known to improve bone density. But it's not just seniors who benefit from the bone-strengthening impact of dairy. Youngsters who consume dairy can also expect an increase in bone mass, which can make them less susceptible to

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injuries like broken bones.

Seniors who consume dairy to improve their bone density should know that a recent study from researchers at the Institute for Aging Research found that not all dairy products are equal when it comes to improving bone density.

While milk and yogurt were linked to higher bone mineral density, dairy products like cream and ice cream contain less protein, calcium and vitamin D and more fat and sugar than yogurt and milk, and these products may actually be associated with lower bone mineral density.

Though there are many ways people can improve their overall health, it's important to consider the nutritional value of dairy when making any alterations to one's diet.

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