Milk: It Does a Body Good?

It all depends on where it comes from – doesn't it?

By Lori Lipinski

The subject of milk sparks just about as much controversy as the subject of fats. Many alternative practitioners feel that it's not necessary for humans to consume cow's milk and link its consumption to health problems, such as ear infections, allergies, cancer and diabetes. On the other hand, the medical community has convinced us that if we don't drink enough milk our bones will disintegrate. And the American Dairy Association wants us to think we'll be cool like celebrities with milk mustaches if we drink lots of milk.

The purpose of this article is not to convince you to drink milk or not to drink milk. Instead, it addresses those who do – or would like to – drink milk and consume dairy products. If you fit into this category, then you need to know where your milk has come from and what it has been through.

Living Conditions

If I were to ask you to picture a cow, you would most likely see in your mind a cow grazing in an open pasture, like one you'd probably seen before on a small family farm. That's a lucky cow, compared to most of the cows bred for dairy production in this country. The majority of commercial dairy cows don't have the luxury of grazing on open fields. Instead they are kept in intense confinement, in individual stalls, on hard cement floors, hooked up to milking machines, forced to produce milk ten months out of the year, in an overcrowded building. This is how the average commercial dairy cow spends her short, miserable life – 42 months on average, compared to 12-15 years for a cow on pasture.

Environment

Not only is the unnatural building environment a problem for the cow, but it can be a huge problem for the people around it as well. The massive amount of waste produced on a factory farm is overwhelming and can have devastating effects on the surrounding environment. Over one-fifth of the country's dairy products are produced in the central valley of California where confinement operations create as much waste as a city of 21 million people! Much of that waste is forced unnaturally into the environment, polluting our lakes, rivers and streams. On the other hand, small farms are able to recycle manure back into the earth to enrich the soil.

Feed

A cow's natural diet consists mostly of grass, but since there isn't enough grass to go around on the factory farm, today's factory cow is fed a diet of mostly grain, and other things" that they would not normally eat. The bulk of the feed consists of corn and soy, which receives 80 percent of all herbicides used in the US. When we think of pesticides we usually think of produce, but animal products can contain up to 14 times more pesticides than plants! [1]

Simply switching the cow's diet from grass to grain can cause many problems, but that's only the beginning. According to a recent article in US News & World Report, “Some 40 billion pounds a year of slaughterhouse wastes like blood, bone and viscera, as well as the remains of millions of euthanized cats and dogs passed along by veterinarians and animal shelters, are rendered annually into livestock feed. … Animal-feed manufacturers and farmers also have begun using or trying out dehydrated food garbage, fats emptied from restaurant fryers and grease traps, cement-kiln dust, even newspapers and cardboard that are derived from plant cellulose. Researchers in addition have experimented with cattle and hog manure, and human sewage sludge." [2]

When I first read this I thought there were probably only a handful of farmers crazy enough to feed dead cats and dogs and other animals parts to their vegetarian cows, but I was dead wrong! During the BSE scare, the FDA ordered a halt to feeding all slaughterhouse wastes to cattle and sheep in the US. At that time 75 percent of the nation's 90 million cattle had been eating feed containing slaughterhouse by-products!

Like humans, animals need nutrients to thrive and be healthy. Obviously the feed given to factory farmed cows is not intended to provide proper nourishment. Instead, farmers, or shall I say food manufacturers, are interested in stuffing whatever they can into the cows to bulk them up as quickly as possible. This can quickly lead to sick animals and heavy doses of drugs. Like pesticides, these drugs end up in the milk of the dairy animals, as do trans fats from bakery wastes, undigested proteins from soy and animal foods and aflatoxins from moldy grain. To make matters worse, levels of vitamin A and D drop off precipitously when cows are given any feed other than green growing grass.

Antibiotics

If you're like a growing number of people today, you would rather not take antibiotics when you get sick. You may even be proud of the fact that you haven't had to use them in years. However, if you drink commercial milk or eat commercially raised meats and poultry, you could be consuming antibiotics on a daily basis, without even knowing it! Over 50 percent of all the antibiotics produced in this country are mixed directly into animal feed. Ideally, antibiotics should be used in farming only when necessary to treat infection. However, due to the sickly nature of factory farmed animals, they are fed a constant supply of antibiotics from birth until the time of slaughter.

Antibiotic resistance is a serious issue that has gotten a lot of press in recent years. Basically, bacteria are mutating and outsmarting the antibiotics, making them ineffective. (The same phenomenon is occurring on farms where bugs are mutating to withstand pesticide applications.) We criticize medical doctors for over-prescribing antibiotics, but that is only part of the problem. Not only are antibiotics overused in this country, but they are also over-consumed. People are unknowingly consuming more antibiotics than they are actually taking by choice. Due to the heavy doses of antibiotics used on factory-farmed animals, your steaks, hamburgers, chicken, and hotdogs are all laced with antibiotics. Milk alone contains traces of up to 80 different antibiotics! [3]

Hormones

Back in 1930, the average dairy cow produced 12 pounds (about a gallon and a half) of milk per day. In 1988, the average was 39 pounds per day. This was accomplished by selective breeding to obtain dairy cows that produced a lot of pituitary hormones, thereby generating large amounts of milk. But the industry was not satisfied with this output. Today rBGH, a synthetic growth hormone, is used to get even more milk out of the dairy cows, bringing the average up to 50 pounds (over 6 gallons) of milk per day.

This sounds like a great thing for dairy farmers, right? However, when you mess with Mother Nature, you will suffer the consequences. FDA documents show that cows injected with rBGH are 79 percent more likely to contract mastitis. [4] In 1991, a report on Monsanto's BGH test herd at the University of Vermont found the same kinds of problems identified by the FDA, plus an alarming number of dead and deformed calves born to cows treated with BGH. [5] Other problems include reproductive difficulties, increased need for antibiotics, digestive problems, enlarged hocks and lesions, and foot problems.

According to the Humane Farming Association, The FDA admits that BGH injections increase

sickness and drug use in dairy cows. Consumer's Union reports that because of increased udder infections, it is more likely that milk from treated cows will be of lower quality – containing more pus and bacteria – than milk from untreated cows." [6]

Pasteurization

Pasteurization is a process of heat treating milk to kill bacteria. Although Louis Pasteur developed this technique for preserving beer and wine, he was not responsible for applying it to milk. That was done at the end of the 1800s as a temporary solution until filthy urban dairies could find a way to produce cleaner milk. But instead of cleaning up milk production, dairies used pasteurization as a way to cover up dirty milk. As milk became more mass produced, pasteurization became necessary for large dairies to increase their profits. So the public then had to be convinced that pasteurized milk was safer than raw milk. Soon raw milk consumption was blamed for all sorts of diseases and outbreaks until the public was finally convinced that pasteurized milk was superior to milk in its natural state.

Today if you mention raw milk, many people gasp and utter ridiculous statements like, “You can die from drinking raw milk!” But the truth is that there are far more risks from drinking pasteurized milk than unpasteurized milk. Raw milk naturally contains healthy bacteria that inhibit the growth of undesirable and dangerous organisms. Without these friendly bacteria, pasteurized milk is more susceptible to contamination. Furthermore, modern equipment, such as milking machines, stainless steel tanks and refrigerated trucks, make it entirely possible to bring clean, raw milk to the market anywhere in the US.

Not only does pasteurization kill the friendly bacteria, it also greatly diminishes the nutrient content of the milk. Pasteurized milk has up to a 66 percent loss of vitamins A, D and E. Vitamin C loss usually exceeds 50 percent. Heat affects water-soluble vitamins and can make them 38 percent to 80 percent less effective. Vitamins B6 and B12 are completely destroyed during pasteurization. Pasteurization also destroys beneficial enzymes, antibodies and hormones. Pasteurization destroys lipase (an enzyme that breaks down fat), which impairs fat metabolism and the ability to properly absorb fat soluble vitamins A and D. (The dairy industry is aware of the diminished vitamin D content in commercial milk, so they fortify it with a form of this vitamin.)

We have all been led to believe that milk is a wonderful source of calcium, when in fact, pasteurization makes calcium and other minerals less available. Complete destruction of phosphatase is one method of testing to see if milk has been adequately pasteurized. Phosphatase is essential for the absorption of calcium.

Ultra-Pasteurization

As the dairy industry has become more concentrated, many processing plants have switched to ultra-pasteurization, which involves higher temperatures and longer treatment times. The industry says this is necessary because many microorganisms have become heat resistant and now survive ordinary pasteurization.

Another reason for ultra-pasteurization is that it gives the milk a longer shelf life – up to four weeks. The grocers like this but many consumers complain of a burnt or dead taste. The milk is virtually sterile – is that what you want to drink?

Milk producers are not advertising the fact that they are ultra-pasteurizing the milk – the word is written in very small letters and the milk is sold in the refrigerator section even though it can be kept

unrefrigerated until opened. Horizon, the major organic brand, is ultra-pasteurized, as are virtually all national brands.

Homogenization

Milk straight from the cow contains cream, which rises to the top. Homogenization is a process that breaks up the fat globules and evenly distributes them throughout the milk so that they do not rise. This process unnaturally increases the surface area of fat exposing it to air, in which oxidation occurs and increases the susceptibility to spoilage. Homogenization has been linked to heart disease and atherosclerosis.

Milk: To Drink or Not to Drink?

Considering how modern commercial milk is produced and processed, it's no wonder that millions of Americans are allergic to it. An allergic reaction to dairy can cause symptoms like diarrhea, vomiting (even projectile vomiting), stomach pain, cramping, gas, bloating, nausea, headaches, sinus and chest congestion, and a sore, or scratchy throat. Milk consumption has been linked to many other health conditions as well, such as asthma, atherosclerosis, diabetes, chronic infections (especially upper respiratory and ear infections), obesity, osteoporosis and cancer of the prostate, ovaries, breast and colon.

Once you understand how modern milk is produced and processed, it seems logical to just avoid it altogether. But Real Milk – full-fat, unprocessed milk from pasture-fed cows – contains vital nutrients like fat-soluble vitamins A and D, calcium, vitamin B6, B12, and CLA (conjugated linoleic acid, a fatty acid naturally occurring in grass-fed beef and milk that reduces body fat and protects against cancer). Real milk is a source of complete protein and is loaded with enzymes. Raw milk contains beneficial bacteria that protect against pathogens and contribute to a healthy flora in the intestines. Culturing milk greatly enhances its probiotic and enzyme content, making it a therapeutic food for our digestive system and overall health.

So the answer to the question is – go ahead and drink milk only if you can get unprocessed milk from pastured cows. In the meantime, here are a few steps that can help you make the transition to more natural dairy products.

Step 1: Remove Commercial Milk from Your Diet

Normally I propose a step-by step process for making a dietary change, but considering where commercial milk has come from, and what it has been through, it is best to just remove it from the diet altogether. Instead use some of the better quality dairy products such as raw cheese, good quality whole yogurt, butter and cream that has not been ultra-pasteurized. (You can use butter or cream mixed with water on breakfast porridge.) Check the Weston A. Price Foundation Shopping Guide for a listing of good quality dairy products sold in supermarkets and health food stores.

Step 2: Find a Source of Real Milk in Your Area

In states like California, this is easy because raw milk is sold in health food stores. In other states you need to either purchase raw milk from a farm or through a cow-share program. The best place to start is by contacting your local chapter or visiting the realmilk.com website. Most people who cannot tolerate commercial milk do beautifully on Real Milk – milk that comes from pastured cows, that contains all the fat and that is unprocessed. It is an especially good food for growing children who need extra nutrients during their growing years.

References

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About the Author

Lori Lipinski is a Certified Nutritional Consultant, lecturer and writer whose articles have been published and quoted in highly respected national and international health journals and books. Lori developed the "Making the Transition" series to help people transition toward a REAL food diet, one step at a time.

http://www.westonaprice.org/transition/dairy.html