

Can Saturated Fat in Milk Help Maintain Good Cholesterol?

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Past studies have noted that milk, even though it is high in saturated fat, does not appear to increase risk of heart disease. Could the saturated fat in milk have some effect that doesn't increase total and bad cholesterol?

Research coming out of the University of Copenhagen suggests that milk might actually help maintain good cholesterol and stave off bad cholesterol, due to a potential relationship between milk's saturated fat and high calcium content.

The results are published in the February issue of the *British Journal of Nutrition*.

Over 10 days, nine subjects were placed on one of four diets: low calcium and low fat; low calcium and high fat; high calcium and low fat; or high calcium and high fat. Blood levels were measured for total cholesterol, low-density lipoprotein (LDL) cholesterol (commonly referred to as "bad" cholesterol), and high-density lipoprotein (HDL) cholesterol (commonly referred to as "good" cholesterol).

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Independent of fat, high calcium was associated with a drop in total and bad cholesterol, but not good cholesterol, compared to low calcium.

Total-to-bad cholesterol ratios decreased, while good-to-bad cholesterol ratios increased, thanks to a high calcium diet.

"In theory, without calcium, dairy would have a bigger impact on [bad cholesterol] levels," said study researcher Arne Astrup. "The protective function of dairy calcium seems to set it apart from other sources of fat. This study supports previous research we have conducted that indicates dairy intake may actually play a role in minimizing the risk for cardiovascular disease versus increasing the risk."