

Longer life for milk drinkers, say researchers

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Research undertaken by the Universities of Reading, Cardiff and Bristol has found that drinking milk ¹ can lessen the chances of dying from illnesses such as coronary heart disease (CHD) and stroke by up to 15-20%.

In recent times milk has often been portrayed by the media as an unhealthy food. The study, led by Professor Peter Elwood (Cardiff University) together with Professor Ian Givens from the University of Reading's Food Chain and Health Research Theme, aimed to establish whether the health benefits of drinking milk outweigh any dangers that lie in its consumption.

Importantly, this is the first time that disease risk associated with drinking milk has been looked at in relation to the number of deaths which the diseases are responsible for.

The review brought together published evidence from 324 studies of milk consumption as predictors of [coronary heart disease](#) (CHD), stroke and, diabetes. Data on milk consumption and cancer were based on the recent World Cancer Research Fund report. The outcomes were then compared with current death rates from these diseases.

Professor Givens explained: "While growth and [bone health](#) are of great importance to health and function, it is the effects of milk and dairy consumption on chronic disease that are of the greatest relevance to reduced morbidity and survival. Our review made it possible to assess overall whether increased milk consumption provides a survival

advantage or not. We believe it does.

“Our findings clearly show that when the numbers of deaths from CHD, stroke and colo-rectal cancer were taken into account, there is strong evidence of an overall reduction in the risk of dying from these [chronic diseases](#) due to milk consumption. We certainly found no evidence that drinking milk might increase the risk of developing any condition, with the exception of [prostate cancer](#). Put together, there is convincing overall evidence that milk consumption is associated with an increase in survival in Western communities.”

The reviewers also believe that increased milk consumption is likely to reduce health care costs substantially due to reduced chronic disease and associated morbidity.

“There is an urgent need to understand the mechanisms involved and for focused studies to confirm the epidemiological evidence since this topic has major implications for the agri-food industry,” added Professor Givens.

More information: Elwood et al. 2008. The Survival Advantage of Milk and Dairy Consumption:an Overview of Evidence from Cohort Studies of Vascular Diseases, Diabetes and Cancer. *Journal of the American College of Nutrition*. Vol. 27, No. 6, 723S-734S

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