

The Full-Fat Paradox: Whole Milk May Keep Us Lean

Allison Aubrey | [NPR](#) | Feb 19th 2014

I have to admit, I melt at the creaminess of full-fat  yogurt.

It's an indulgence that we're told to resist. And I try to abide. (Stealing a bite of my daughter's YoBaby doesn't count, does it?)

The reason we're told to limit dairy fat seems pretty straightforward. The extra calories packed into the fat are bad for our waistlines – that's the assumption.

But what if dairy fat isn't the dietary demon we've been led to believe it is? New research suggests we may want to look anew.

Consider the findings of two recent studies that conclude the consumption of whole-fat dairy is linked to reduced body fat.

In one [paper](#), published by Swedish researchers in the *Scandinavian Journal of Primary Health Care*, middle-aged men who consumed high-fat milk, butter and cream were significantly less likely to become obese over a period of 12 years compared with men who never or rarely ate high-fat dairy.

Yep, that's right. The butter and whole-milk eaters did better at keeping the pounds off.

"I would say it's counterintuitive," says [Greg Miller](#), executive vice president of the National Dairy Council.

The second [study](#), published in the *European Journal of Nutrition*, is a meta-analysis of 16 observational studies.

There has been a hypothesis that high-fat dairy foods contribute to obesity and heart disease risk, but the reviewers concluded that the evidence does not support this hypothesis. In fact, the reviewers found that in most of the studies, high-fat dairy was associated with a *lower* risk of obesity.

“We continue to see more and more data coming out [finding that] consumption of whole-milk dairy products is associated with reduced body fat,” Miller says.

It’s not clear what might explain this phenomenon. Lots of folks point to the satiety factor. The higher levels of fat in whole milk products may make us feel fuller, faster. And as a result, the thinking goes, we may end up eating less.

Or the explanation could be more complex. “There may be bioactive substances in the milk fat that may be altering our metabolism in a way that helps us utilize the fat and burn it for energy, rather than storing it in our bodies,” Miller says.

Whatever the mechanism, this association between higher dairy fat and lower body weight appears to hold up in children, too.

As we [reported](#) last year, a study of children published in the *Archives Of Diseases in Childhood*, a sister publication of the *British Medical Journal*, concluded that low-fat milk was associated with more weight gain over time.

“It really surprised us,” study author Mark DeBoer, a pediatrician at the University of Virginia, told us.

So, where does this leave us, the *rule-followers*, who have complied with the skim-milk-is-best edict?

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