



About Dairy Products

Milk is the best of all nutritive substances... Through its kindred or similar properties, it augments the quality of ojas in the body. —Sushrut Samhita

The Controversy Over Dairy

Many health food approaches today encourage people to eliminate dairy products from their diet. According to their theories, many symptoms and ailments are caused by dairy intake, including mucus congestion, inflammation, arthritis, and others.

Milk Protein

Interestingly, all milk in the days of Ayurveda, and even largely in India today, is “A2” milk from Brahman cows. Casein is the primary protein in milk, and there are two subtypes common today, “A1” and “A2.” The A1 casein is the usual type found in milk of cows prevalent in the West, and is the type most implicated in creating allergy. A2 milk from Brahman cows is more easily digestible and less allergenic.

A2 milk from Brahman and other A2 -producing cows is rapidly gaining popularity and is appearing in health food stores as a healthier alternative to the usual A1 milk. Other common breeds making A2 milk are: Jersey, Guernsey, Normande and Brown Swiss. So, Ayurveda was on solid ground in recommending dairy for all the reasons given below, without concern for causing allergies and other health problems from poorly digested milk.

Lactose

Lactose intolerance can be overcome in many cases by proper use of milk, as given by the guidelines below. In addition, dairy fat from grass-fed cows is high in alpha-linoleic acid, a potent anti-cancer compound. It may well be that the association of dairy and animal fat in cancer has more to do with the fat-soluble toxins, including PCB's, hormones, pesticides, etc., that accumulate in the flesh and fat of non-organically fed animals. All dairy products in your diet should be 100% organic and ideally grass-fed as well.

Vegan or Vegetarian for You?

There is accumulating evidence that a vegan diet, and similarly a vegetarian diet, as well as plant-based, whole foods diets in general, are associated with healthier and longer life than the usual “SAD” or standard American diet, replete with processed foods, meat, excessive sugar, etc.

However, after thirty years of practice, I have realized that every person is unique, and people are healthiest and thrive most when they follow the inner guidance their body is giving them.

In particular, while ethically sound health-promoting, many people do not thrive on a vegan diet. I have many patients over the years have reported this to me—even though philosophically, veganism appeals to them.

There may be many reasons for this, and may vary depending on the person. One factor may relate to adopting a vegan diet later in life.

Ayurvedic doctors from India that I've worked with have observed that those eating a vegan diet from birth (after mother's milk, of course!) or even a vegetarian diet, do better on that diet than those who adopted it in their later teens or twenties. The body of those born vegan/vegetarian may develop the ability at a young age to extract the nutrition it needs from the more challenging process of digesting all high fiber, plant foods.

Whatever diet you decide to follow in your life (and it may very well change over the years as your body or your needs change,) if you choose to eat dairy, please follow the Ayurvedic guidelines below. You'll minimize any potential side-effects and may reap the many benefits that organic, grass-fed dairy can bring!

The Benefits of Dairy According to Ayurveda

Ayurveda recommends intake of milk and certain dairy products, especially for those with vata and pitta constitutions, or imbalances in either of these doshas. This is because of milk's inherent strengthening and vitalizing effect, and also because it is the food substance most easily converted to sukra and ojas in the body. Ojas is the subtlest material aspect of the body through which intelligence flows and on which the strength and immunity of the body depends.

These two points of view can be reconciled when we understand more deeply the effect dairy products have on digestion and on the three doshas. In short, if prepared or consumed improperly, dairy products can produce negative effects. However, if consumed according to Ayurvedic guidelines, they are a very useful and health-promoting aspect of the diet.

The proper use of dairy products relies on three major factors: (1) The quality of the milk from which they are made, (2) The method of preparation of the milk or milk product, (3) How we eat them, at what time, and in combination with what other foods, and ultimately, (4) How well we digest them once consumed.

The Main Points to Remember

QUALITY

1. Milk for drinking, or for use in cooking or preparing other dairy products such as yogurt, should be of the highest quality. It should be from cows fed on pesticide-free grass, who are not given hormones or antibiotics, and be non-homogenized. "Grass-grazed, pastured or grass-fed.
2. Organic ghee is now available in most whole foods markets.

PREPARATION AND CONSUMPTION

Cold or unboiled milk is extremely heavy, and serves to increase the slimy secretions of the organs, whereas by boiling it is freed from those injurious traits. --Susrut Samhita

A. MILK

- Milk should be brought to a rolling boil before drinking or using to make yogurt, and should be drunk while still hot or warm.
- Ideally, milk should be "thrice-boiled," meaning brought to a boil, removed from heat until the boiling settles, then put back on the heat until it boils again, and this process repeated yet a third time. This is said to make the milk most digestible and healthful.
- Milk should be consumed only with foods with sweet taste including breads, rice, grains, cereals, and "sweets."
- Milk should not be eaten along with a meal which includes other tastes (i.e., is not appropriate as an accompaniment to most luncheon or dinner menus.)
- Also, milk should not be consumed with raw fruits or fruit juices except mango, raisins or dates. This is due to the sour taste of most fruit (including bananas which have a sour "post-digestive" taste,) that disturbs the digestion of the milk. Also, it should not be consumed with salty foods, such as salty crackers or pretzels, for the same reason. Disturbed digestion leads to ama and negative after effects.
- Fresh heavy cream has properties different from milk and may be used in moderation with fresh fruit and in cooking for soups, vegetable dishes, pasta, etc.

B. CURDS

Any food that is made from curdled liquid is referred in Ayurveda as “curd.” These include cheese, cottage cheese, buttermilk, yogurt, sour cream and tofu (soybean curd.)

Curds must never be eaten in the evening or night due to their tendency to obstruct the channels (srotas,) of the body. Obstruction of the srotas is one of the most fundamental factors in disease production according to Ayurveda. It is a major cause of arthritis, sinusitis, respiratory problems, and the breakdown in immunity that leads to a host of other disorders.

In fact, curdled foods should not be eaten on a daily basis for most people, or the cumulative effect will be increased ama and blockage of the srotas.

In addition, curds should be consumed while very fresh. By Ayurvedic standards, any commercially sold yogurt or cheese is too old to be considered “fresh.”

I. Yogurt

Yogurt should be prepared at home in the evening, and consumed the next day. Refrigerating it and letting it sit for more than one day increases the sourness and “stickiness” of the curd and when consumed, it will tend to obstruct the srotas or circulatory channels. Its sour quality will also tend to aggravate pitta and kapha. It would be better not to eat yogurt at all than to eat commercially-prepared brands or to eat homemade yogurt that is more than a day old.

2. Cheese

- As explained above, cheese should not be eaten in the evening (no midnight pizzas!) Solid cheeses available in the supermarket tend to increase pitta and kapha. The “sharper” the cheese, the more pitta increasing effect it has. Cheese is generally more easily digested during the winter months, when the agni (digestive power) is strongest. Cheese may be taken in small quantities at lunch time, up to 2-3 times a week, if desired, unless recommended otherwise by your physician.
- Cottage cheese, fresh mozzarella, fresh goat cheese and ricotta cheese are more easily digested and are recommended in general over solid cheeses.
- Homemade cheese, called “panir,” is the best cheese to consume on a regular basis. It is much preferable to commercial cheeses and may be eaten daily at lunch time. (Recipe available.) Panir balances both vata and pitta. Sautéed in a healthful oil with turmeric and other spices to further enhance digestibility. May also be crumbled and cooked with chopped greens to reduce the kapha or heavy effect.
- Soy cheese are curds and should be eaten according to the same guidelines as dairy cheeses.

3. Tofu

- Tofu is a protein-rich, low-fat curd which is available in commercial brands which are acceptable. The soft variety is recommended.
- Overall, tofu or tempeh is more easily digested than solid soy or dairy cheese and is preferred over solid cheeses for regular consumption.
- Tofu is a curd and should not be eaten in the evening. However, at lunch time or as a breakfast food is acceptable.
- Due to 2 independent research studies linking moderate mid-life tofu consumption to increased risk of cognitive decline later in life, we recommend that tofu be limited to no more than once a week.

C. FROZEN DESSERTS: ICE CREAM, FROZEN YOGURT, ETC.

These foods are the epitome of kapha-aggravating and digestion-suppressing foods. Due to their extreme coldness, they suppress the digestive “fire” (acids and enzymes, which are temperature dependent.) In addition, they are a dairy product, are very sweet, and, in the case of ice cream, high in fat, which all contribute to a kapha-increasing effect.

If you have mucus congestion; sinus, ear, nose, or throat problems; allergies, asthma, arthritis, digestive problems, overweight, or nearly any other health problem, you would do well to strictly avoid these frozen desserts.

If you are very healthy, have strong pitta in your constitution, and it is very warm outside, you may eat these occasionally if you strongly desire them. It is better to eat them in the afternoon and not right after eating, to avoid interfering with the digestion of the meal.

D. GOAT'S MILK

Often goat's milk is tolerated when cow's milk is not. Perhaps because it is inherently “A2” milk as well. It is less sweet, lighter and more astringent in taste and quality than cow's milk, making it a good choice for anyone with excess mucus tendency, or digestive sensitivity. Goat's milk is more balancing to kapha and pitta doshas and has very good effects on the liver and pitta imbalance according to Ayurveda. It should be boiled and drunk while warm, just as with cow's milk.

E. DIGESTION

Use of Lactaid milk for lactose intolerant individuals is acceptable, however, measures should be taken to strength the digestive capacity so that Lactaid is not necessary.

Many individuals with milk intolerance find that if they boil the milk first, ideally with a pinch cardamom, turmeric or fresh ginger root, drink it warm, and avoid consuming it with other than sweet-tasting foods, they no longer have any problems digesting milk.

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In today's polarizing, oversimplified diet scene, it's refreshing to know that the comprehensive, practical body of Ayurvedic knowledge, increasingly validated by research, remains as relevant and helpful as ever.

Personalized, precise and profoundly healing, Ayurvedic health wisdom is here to guide us in tailoring our diet and lifestyle to our unique needs - to thrive, be healthy and live long.

Try Personalized Guidance by an Integrative, Ayurvedic MD

Dr. Lonsdorf trained at Johns Hopkins and Stanford, and has over 30 years of clinical practice applying Ayurveda in a wide variety of conditions, as well as for prevention and optimal health.

She conducts consultations by video conference and phone around the world, as well as in-person visit in Iowa and California.

For more information, please reach out to us at the contact information listed below.

Wishing you the best of health!

Dr. Nancy Lonsdorf