

Influence of Public Knowledge on Consumption of Dairy and Dairy Substitutes

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Abstract

Background: Dairy-free diets have gained popularity within the United States based off of minimal scientific evidence to support the overall healthfulness of eliminating dairy. There is limited existing research as to factors that influence dairy consumption or how many people adhere to a dairy-restricted diet.

Objective: The objective of this study was to determine public perception of the healthfulness of dairy and consumption patterns. It was hypothesized that due to recent media coverage and dietary trends, dairy products have gained a negative connotation and consumption has decreased.

Methods: An online survey was created to assess participants' perception of the healthfulness of dairy and consumption trends of dairy and dairy substitutes. Participants age 18-65 were recruited via email and social media. Data was analyzed using SPSS.

Results: Among survey participants (N=213), the majority consume dairy (91%, n=194), with 77% (n=164) stating they consume 1-2 cups daily. There was a significant correlation ($p < 0.01$) between whether participants consume dairy and how healthy they view dairy products. The majority of respondents believe that dairy is healthy in moderation (70.4%, n=150), though 34.3% (n=73) believe that cow's milk is nutritionally inferior to milk alternatives. There was a significant correlation ($p < 0.01$) between current dairy consumption and consumption of dairy during childhood. However, 42.7% (n=91) of participants stated that their preference for dairy has decreased over the past 5 years. Of the participants who had a decreased preference for dairy, their primary reasons were due to personal research (26.3%, n=56) and media influence (15%, n=32).

Conclusions: The majority of respondents reported consumption of dairy products and perceived dairy to be healthy in moderation. However, a large number of participants' preference for dairy has decreased in recent years due to personal research and media influence. Future research should also include comparison of consumption trends to evidence-based dietary recommendations

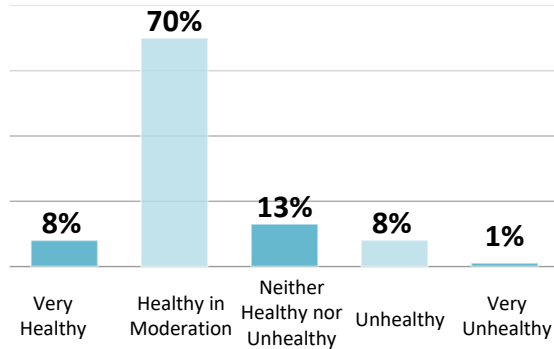
Background

Although the United States Department of Agriculture has recommended dairy consumption as part of a healthy diet for over 50 years, dairy-free diets have gained popularity within the United States based off of minimal scientific evidence to support the overall healthfulness of eliminating dairy. There is limited existing research as to factors that influence dairy consumption or how many people adhere to a dairy-restricted diet. Despite the lack of scientific evidence, dairy consumption has continually decreased to the point of major dairy production companies filing for bankruptcy. Although there may be negative effects of dairy consumption for specific populations, the overwhelming majority of research does not support the conclusion that dairy should be excluded by the general public for health benefits, unless medically recommended.

Methods

The objective of this study was to determine public perception of the healthfulness of dairy and consumption patterns. It was hypothesized that due to recent media coverage and dietary trends, dairy products have gained a negative connotation and consumption has decreased. To assess this hypothesis, a twenty question online survey, via SurveyMonkey, was distributed to over 200 individuals, age 18-65+. Participants were recruited via email and social media. SPSS was used to analyze the data collected with a significance level of $p < 0.05$.

Perception of Healthfulness of Dairy



Results

Among survey participants (N=213), the majority consume dairy (91%, n=194), with 77% (n=164) stating they consume 1-2 cups daily. There was a significant correlation ($p < 0.01$) between whether participants consume dairy and how healthy they view dairy products. The majority of respondents believe that dairy is healthy in moderation (70.4%, n=150), though 34.3% (n=73) believe that cow's milk is nutritionally inferior to milk alternatives. There was a significant correlation ($p < 0.01$) between current dairy consumption and consumption of dairy during childhood. However, 42.7% (n=91) of participants stated that their preference for dairy has decreased over the past 5 years. Of the participants who had a decreased preference for dairy, their primary reasons were due to personal research (26.3%, n=56) and media influence (15%, n=32). Among the participants who consume dairy, 33% (n=70) cited at least one reason for why they avoid dairy products.



Discussion and Conclusions

The data collected revealed that the majority of survey participants consume dairy daily. A possible limitation to the study is that a large majority of participants were students enrolled in nutrition classes at Texas Christian University, therefore the results may not be representative of more diverse populations. Additionally, there may have been a misunderstanding across the participants regarding the difference between "avoiding" and "limiting" when describing personal dairy consumption. This can be seen as 91% of participants (n=194) reported consuming dairy products; however 33% (n= 70) cited at least one reason why they avoid dairy products. The majority of respondents reported consumption of dairy products daily and perceived dairy to be healthy in moderation. However, a large number of participants' preference for dairy has decreased in recent years due to personal research and media influence. Future research should also include comparison of consumption trends to evidence-based dietary recommendations.

Change in Dairy Preferences Over 5 Years

