Media Release
4 May 2011

Self diagnosed intolerance linked to chronic health problems

New research shows people with self-perceived lactose intolerance may be at risk of poor bone health and higher rates of diabetes and hypertension.

The study published in the latest *American Journal Clinical Nutrition* examined the effects of self-perceived lactose intolerance – whether they were self-diagnosed or physician-diagnosed – on calcium intake and risk of specific health problems related to reduced calcium intakes.

The US researchers surveyed 3452 adults aged 19-70 and found participants who identified themselves as lactose intolerant had significantly lower calcium intakes than those who did not, particularly from lower intakes of dairy foods such as milk, cheese and yogurt.

Participants with self-perceived lactose intolerance were also significantly more likely to have been diagnosed with hypertension and diabetes.

Dairy Australia dietitian Glenys Zucco said people sometimes avoid milk and other dairy products due to concerns about lactose intolerance, but eliminating these nutrient-rich foods could impact diet and health.

“Dairy is a readily accessible source of calcium, and nine other essential nutrients such as magnesium, potassium and vitamin A. Inadequate consumption of these nutrients may increase the risk for chronic health problems,” she said.

But people who are concerned about lactose intolerance may still be able to enjoy dairy foods.

In 2010 a panel of experts was assembled by the National Institutes of Health (NIH) to review the available scientific evidence about lactose intolerance and health after experts expressed concern people were self-diagnosing lactose intolerance and eliminating nutrient-rich foods such as dairy from their diet.

A consensus paper released by the group advised that in most cases eliminating dairy foods may be unnecessary.

‘Even in persons with diagnosed lactose intolerance, small amounts of milk, yogurt, hard cheeses, and reduced-lactose foods may be effective approaches to managing the condition,’ the paper reported.

Ms Zucco said hard cheeses (like cheddar and parmesan) contained virtually no lactose, making them generally well tolerated.

“Yogurt is also usually well digested due to the natural bacterial cultures it contains – which help to digest lactose,” she said.

“Milk can also be tolerated well – with a little know how. Drinking milk in small amounts throughout the day, as well as enjoying it with meals, can reduce intolerance symptoms.

“And if lactose tolerance is particularly low, there are a number of lactose-free cow’s milks available in supermarkets.”

---


2 NATIONAL INSTITUTES OF HEALTH CONSENSUS DEVELOPMENT CONFERENCE STATEMENT NIH Consensus Development Conference: Lactose Intolerance and Health February 22–24, 2010

---

Glenys Zucco — Dietitian, Dairy Australia
03 9694 3842 I 0409 552 554 I gzucco@dairyaustralia.com.au