
Monday 10 September 2012

Government urged to stand by its dairy health evidence

For immediate release

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Australian Dairy Farmers (ADF) is calling on the Federal Government to stand by its own evidence when it comes to setting dietary advice about dairy foods.

For the first time in almost 10 years the Dietary Guidelines for Australians are under revision to recognise changes to nutrition science and to ensure they reflect the latest knowledge on nutrition and health.

However, ADF has expressed concern that the National Health and Medical Research Council's (NHMRC) dietary guidelines working committee's proposed advice on dairy foods is at odds with current evidence, and could be potentially detrimental to Australian's health outcomes.

The NHMRC proposes recommending Australians consume milk, yogurt and cheese that is 'mostly reduced-fat' and that overall consumption of regular-fat dairy foods should be halved.

Chris Griffin, president of ADF said there was no compelling reason to avoid regular-fat dairy foods. "The trouble with the reduced-fat message is that it is not evidenced-based, and it puts people off regular-fat dairy foods, the type that most Australians prefer."

"Some people, particularly men, reduce their overall dairy food intake when advised to eat reduced-fat dairy foods." (*See charts below*)

"The NHMRC's own evidence statements do not support a recommendation to encourage mostly reduced-fat dairy," he said. "The NHMRC is ignoring the evidence from tens of thousands of people in scientific studies in favour of theoretical modelling."

In 2011 the dietary guidelines working committee released a review of evidence which showed consumption of *all* types of milk, yogurt and cheese was linked to a reduced risk of heart disease, stroke, hypertension, type-2 diabetes and colorectal cancer, and improved bone mineral density. Neither regular-fat nor reduced-fat dairy foods were linked with weight gain or obesity.

More recent evidence summaries have shown there is evidence high-fat dairy foods have a protective role against weight gain - with no difference whether people consume regular-fat or reduced-fat dairy foods to their risk of heart disease.

"The evidence is clear - it is more important Australians get the health benefits of eating enough dairy foods, rather than getting inappropriately hung-up on the fat content," Mr Griffin said.

"Research shows seven out of 10 females and six out of 10 males aged 12 years and over fail to get their minimum recommended daily intake and therefore miss out on the health benefits of dairy products.

"Inadequate dairy consumption in Australia has recently been estimated to cost the healthcare system \$2 billion per year – an amount comparable to the entire public health budget.

Removing the 'mostly reduced-fat' recommendation would make the Dietary Guidelines consistent with the scientific evidence and improve the health of Australians."

"Australians expect guidelines that are evidence-based. These reviews do not come around very often – so it's critical the NHMRC gets it right," said Mr Griffin.

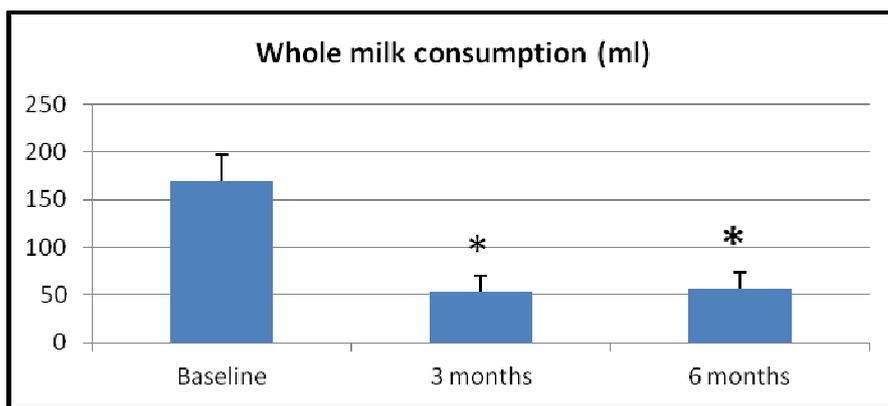
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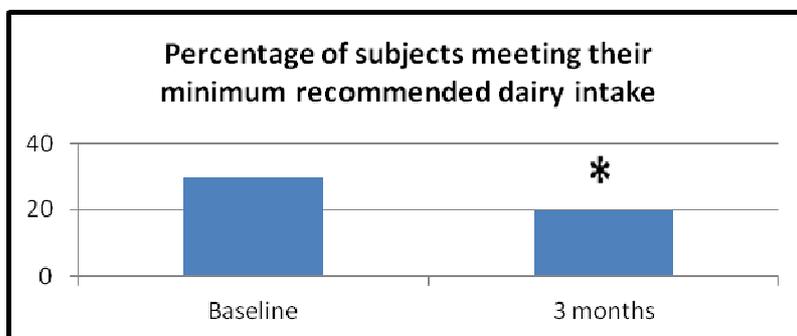
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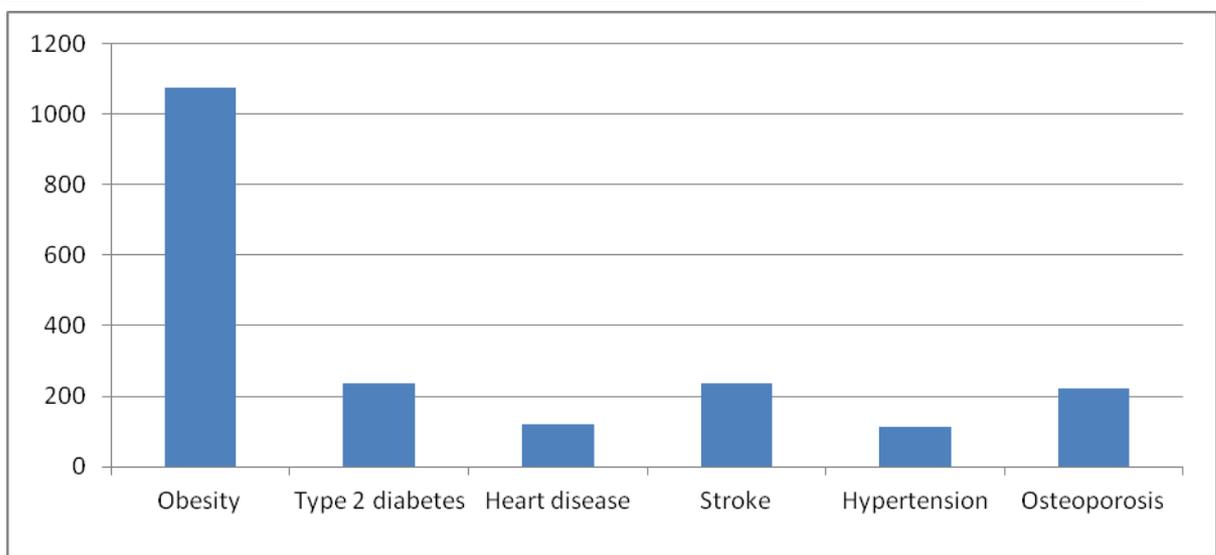
Advice to switch from regular-fat to reduced-fat dairy foods *reduces* men's overall dairy consumption. In a study in men, there was a **68%** (P<0.01) decline in consumption of whole milk and **no** increase in the use of reduced-fat milk or reduced-fat dairy foods overall following advice to switch from regular-fat to reduced-fat dairy foods. (Collins et al., 2011 Public Health Nutrition 14, 168-75)



The proportion of adults meeting their minimum dairy intake recommendations fell by **35%** in a trial in which men and women were given advice to switch from regular-fat to reduced-fat dairy foods. (Nolan-Clark et al., 2011 Presentation at Dieticians' Association of Australia Conference)



\$2.0 billion in direct healthcare expenditure were attributable to low consumption of dairy products in Australia, 2010-11 An amount comparable with total spending on public health in Australia Doidge, JC, Segal, L & Gospodarevskaya E (2012) Journal of Nutrition published on line July 25



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