Type 2 diabetes

Food choices can affect the risk of developing type 2 diabetes. The Australian Dietary Guidelines recommend eating a variety of nutritious foods from the five food groups daily. Some of these foods, like milk, cheese, and yoghurt, may even reduce the risk of developing type 2 diabetes.[1]

The role of dairy in preventing type 2 diabetes

Both reduced-fat and regular-fat milk, cheese and yoghurt are not linked to type 2 diabetes. In fact, a higher overall dairy intake may even be protective. A 2014 meta-analysis of 14 studies found dairy was not associated with diabetes, while yoghurt reduced risk by 18 per cent.[2]

A further review looking at 16 separate studies and over 520,000 people found higher intakes of all varieties of milk, cheese and yoghurt was linked to an 11 per cent reduction in the risk of type 2 diabetes, compared to people eating fewer dairy foods. Every 200 grams of dairy was linked to a 6 per cent reduction, and 30 grams of cheese per day reduced risk by 20 per cent.[3]

It is likely that calcium, vitamin D, protein, and magnesium in dairy may help regulate insulin responses.[4] Some dairy fatty acids, like pentadecanoic acid (15:0), may also play a beneficial role.[5]

Dairy and weight management in type 2 diabetes

Losing excess weight, especially around the waist, lowers diabetes risk and helps manage the condition. Dairy foods are often associated with weight gain, despite consistent evidence showing the opposite.[6] Due to this misconception, some health professionals hesitate to recommend dairy to those at risk. However, milk, cheese and yoghurt may support weight management and reduce waistlines when included as part of a balanced diet.[7]

Most Australians need to more milk, yoghurt, cheese and/or alternatives (mostly reduced-fat).[8]

Dairy and heart health

Heart disease is a common condition that can shares risk factors with type 2 diabetes and occur alongside it.

For those with existing heart issues, reduced-fat dairy is an option. If there is no history of heart disease or high cholesterol, either regular-or-reduced fat dairy can be recommended.[9] Both types of dairy provide Australians with essential nutrients and health benefits unique to dairy foods.

Dietary management of type 2 diabetes

Dairy foods like milk, cheese, and yoghurt can help manage type 2 diabetes. Milk and yoghurt have a low glycaemic index (GI), preventing sharp blood sugar spikes. Like all low GI foods, they are more slowly digested, absorbed and metabolised, increasing feelings of fullness and reducing feelings of hunger.

Milk, cheese and yoghurt are considered an ideal low GI food due to the combination of their carbohydrate source (lactose) having a naturally low GI, and the presence of protein which helps slow the release of glucose into the bloodstream. One study showed a low GI diet high in dairy foods and fruit, but low in potatoes and cereals, improved insulin sensitivity in adults over 65.[10]

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Dairy Australia
1800 004 377
enquiries@dairyaustralia.com.au
dairyaustralia.com.au

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