

Drinking whole cow's milk in early childhood may be linked to lower obesity risk later

CHILD has found that children who drink whole cow's milk at age 5 tend to have lower fat mass and less risk of obesity by age 8, compared to kids who drink no fat or skim-fat milk.

Published in *The American Journal of Clinical Nutrition*, this finding adds to a growing body of evidence challenging the common recommendation that young children should consume reduced-fat or skim milk to prevent obesity.

WHOLE MILK MAY ENCOURAGE LOWER BMI

The researchers analyzed data from over 1500 CHILD participants. At 5 and 8 years old, the parents or caregivers of these participants reported on their diets, including the milk they consumed, and researchers took various physical measurements of the children, including for body fat and obesity.

An analysis of this data showed that at age 5, almost 50% of the children consumed 2% milk and almost 24% consumed 3.25% milk.

Researchers also found that consuming whole milk, compared to skimmed milk, was associated with lower body-mass-index (BMI) scores among these kids at age 5, and with overall lower obesity and adiposity (body fat) indicators at age 8.

POSSIBLE CAUSES

As to why drinking whole milk is associated with lower obesity risk, the researchers say the exact reason is unknown but there are various potential explanations.

Among them, the fact that milk fat may interact with hormones to create a sense of satiety (feeling full), and that the combined components of milk, including fat, may produce unique metabolic effects that similarly influence satiety and energy balance.

Whatever the reason, these findings indicate that even small differences in milk fat consumption in early childhood may carry real implications for one's body fat in future.

RECONSIDERING GUIDELINES

Current North American guidelines generally recommend transitioning children to reduced-fat milk after age two to limit saturated fat intake. These guidelines are largely based on information from studies of adults.

This finding from CHILD, on the contrary, suggests that current recommendations should be reconsidered, with special attention paid to information from studies focused on children.

Childhood obesity is a pressing public health issue, the researchers note, so we should use every available opportunity to prevent the beginnings of obesity in early life. This study points to a potentially helpful step that can be easily taken.

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Lower risk of overweight or obesity among 8-year-old kids who drink whole cow's milk at age 5

Current guidelines, which recommend kids drink low-fat milk to avoid obesity, need to be reconsidered

More Canadian kids drink low-fat rather than whole milk at age 5

Drinking whole milk in early childhood is a simple step one can take to help lower obesity risk later

Zellman T et al. The American Journal of Clinical Nutrition, 2026

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