

Media Release

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Daily dose of dairy boosts mental performance

A new study suggests frequent intake of dairy foods is linked to better mental performance.¹

Researchers from the University of South Australia and America's University of Maine analysed dietary habits and mental function of 972 US adults.

Consuming dairy products such as milk, cheese and yogurt at least once a day was associated with greater performance in mental functions including verbal memory, visual-spatial memory, organisation and abstract reasoning, compared with those who consumed dairy less frequently.

Less-frequent consumption of dairy foods was associated with significantly more depressive symptoms, lower folate levels and an increased prevalence of cardiovascular disease and high blood pressure.

While the underlying mechanisms of dairy's benefits on mental performance are unknown, the authors suggest the unique nutrient content might play a role.

"Dairy foods contain a number of important nutrients such as calcium, whey protein, vitamin D, magnesium and phosphorus," said lead researcher Georgina Crichton.

"There is evidence that these nutrients might assist in weight and fat reduction, and in the control of blood pressure and diabetes.

"As our findings remained significant after controlling for cardiovascular risk factors, perhaps some of these nutrients are having a direct effect on brain function," Ms Crichton said.

The researchers reviewed earlier research and identified eight other studies reporting associations between dairy food intake and mental function.

They noted that the studies consistently show greater intakes of milk and dairy products are associated with better general cognitive (mental) function.

Dairy Australia Dietitian, Glenys Zucco said these new results were promising and warranted further investigation.

"Mental decline and dementia is an increasing problem for Australia's ageing population. But growing evidence suggests lifestyle and health factors such as dietary intake could promote better mental function," said Ms Zucco.

"Higher intakes of dairy foods have been shown to provide a number of health benefits, and promoting better mental performance might be one to add to the list in the future," she said.

¹ Crichton, G.E., Elias, M.F., Dore, G.A., Robbins, M.A.. Relations between dairy food intake and cognitive function: the Maine-Syracuse Longitudinal Study, *International Dairy Journal* (2011), doi:10.1016/j.idairyj.2011.08.001

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