



Why Santa needs milk and cookies

It's no secret that Santa has a weight problem. Of course, it is important for him to maintain his image of being a man of substance. But he still needs to get down some fairly tight chimneys and doesn't want to make the reindeer work too hard, not to mention his heart.

Question: So, you might wonder, "Why does Santa want milk and cookies left out for him as he makes his rounds?"

Answer: We were lucky enough to get a call through to Santa and to ask this very question. Believe it or not, Santa is an avid reader of the latest in nutrition research, especially when it relates to weight control. He pointed out that the cookies are mainly for the purpose of maintaining his endurance on this long night. He needs the carbohydrates to keep his energy up and to supply plenty of glucose to the brain to remember who's been naughty and who's been nice. He said he rarely eats cookies other than on Christmas Eve and Christmas Day.

Q: So why does Santa request milk?

A: Santa told us he would really rather have milk than soda, because over the years he has

found that milk products help him keep his weight in check. Although a bit overweight by some standards, Santa points out that unlike the average American, he has not gained weight over the past few decades. He has actually lost a bit.

Living at the North Pole, Santa likes to read the Honolulu Star-Bulletin and dream of warm weather. He cited a "Health Options" column from May 1, 2002, that summarized research showing that milk's high calcium level is thought to decrease the amount of fat that accumulates in fat cells. Consequently, Santa has milk or other milk products such as yogurt every day of the year.

Q: Is there any other element or compound in milk that may help Santa to decrease his body fat?

A: Milk also contains a compound called conjugated linoleic acid (CLA for short). In both animal and human research, diets supplemented with CLA have been shown to help reduce body fat. But this is only one benefit. A number of studies report that CLA assists in regulating type-2 (non-insulin dependent) diabetes and may also inhibit cancers such as breast, prostate and colon cancers.

Q: Isn't milk fat associated with an increased risk of heart disease?

A: Even though milk and milk products contain moderate amounts of animal fat, when consumed as part of an overall balanced diet, milk fat does not appear to increase the risk of heart disease. In fact, milk may actually reduce the risk -- possibly due to the increased amount of calcium in the diet, resulting in reduced blood pressure, or possibly due to CLA content.

Q: Is CLA found in skim milk?

A: Because CLA is a component of milk fat, non-fat milk and non-fat milk products do not contain CLA.

Q: How much CLA is in milk?

A: One cup contains only about 5 percent of the CLA used in most human research on CLA supplements. Consequently, researchers such as Dr. John Kennelly at the University of Alberta in Canada are studying how changing the feed of dairy cows affects CLA levels in milk.

Our conversation with Santa finished with him firmly reminding us that when it comes to taste or health, cookies go much better with milk than with any other beverage.

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