



Health push focuses on lower fat milk

The slogan "Start Living Healthy" forms the centerpiece of the Department of Health's "Healthy Hawaii Initiative." With the goal to improve the overall health of people in Hawaii, this innovative program encourages people to get more active, eat well and live tobacco-free. If every person in Hawaii did these three things, the impact on public health would be gigantic. The campaign employs messages that encourage simple changes that can have lifelong benefits.

The "1% or Less is Best" campaign is the latest effort to encourage people to consume lower-fat milk products. This decreases saturated fat in the diet and potentially reduces the overall risk of various chronic diseases.

Question: Is switching milk types really worth the effort?

Answer: For most people this change makes good sense. For those who drink two glasses of milk a day, a simple change from whole to 1 percent cuts about 2 teaspoons of total fat, 1 teaspoon of saturated fat and about 100 calories per day.

Q: Does lower-fat milk have as much calcium as whole milk?

A: Actually, lower fat milk has slightly more, because calcium is contained in the liquid portion of milk. Removing milk fat does not remove calcium.

Q: What about taste?

A: In a blind-tasting survey in Hawaii, it was found that most people could not tell the differences among various types of milk, especially when the milk is well-chilled.

Q: Are there people who should not drink lower-fat milk?

A: The Institute of Medicine recommends that children under 4 get 30 to 40 percent of their calories from fat. So low-fat milk is not generally recommended for young children.

Q: Why do some messages compare a glass of whole milk to five strips of bacon?

A: Although whole milk contains about half the total fat of cooked bacon, 1 cup contains similar amounts of saturated fat. Other ways to decrease total saturated fat for long-term health would be to replace cream or half-and-half in your coffee with whole milk and then

potentially use lower fat as your taste buds adjust.

If you are one of the few who genuinely prefer the taste of whole milk, continue to enjoy it, but decrease other foods in your diet that are high in saturated fat.

Q: Would it be better to switch to soy milk?

A: If soy milk is fortified with calcium and vitamins D and B-12, it can be a reasonable substitute. But milk contains 50 percent more of the branched-chain amino acids thought to play a role in weight control and 40 percent more of the essential amino acid lysine, which can be lacking in some low-protein diets. Of course, there is no law against drinking both types of milk.

Remember, "Start Living Healthy" is about taking enough baby steps to add up to better health. Switching to 1 percent or less can be an easy baby step toward health. What's Step 2? Stay tuned for more messages and keep on stepping.

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