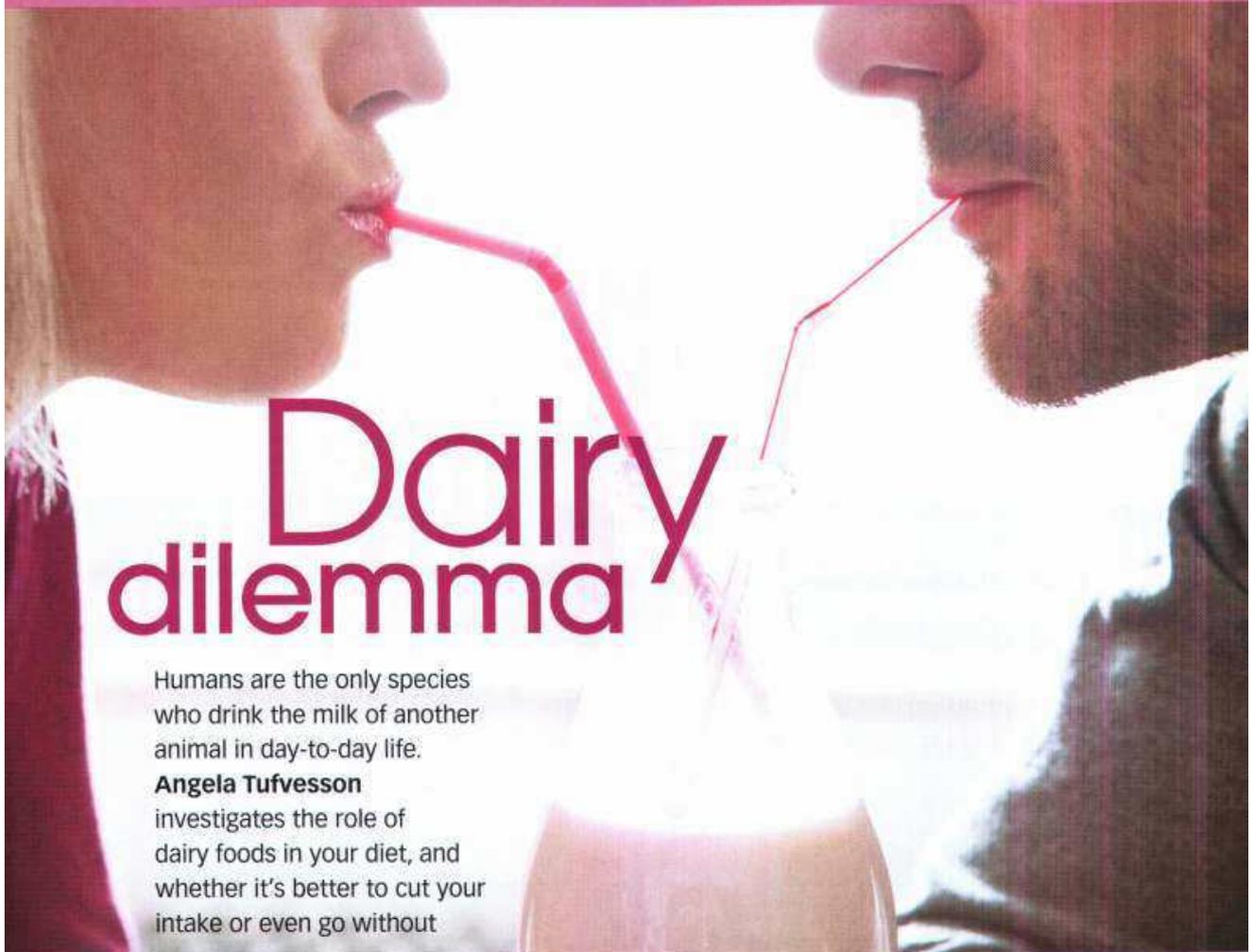




nutrition



Dairy dilemma

Humans are the only species who drink the milk of another animal in day-to-day life.

Angela Tufvesson investigates the role of dairy foods in your diet, and whether it's better to cut your intake or even go without

In a health industry littered with debate on the nutritional merit of everything from red meat to chocolate, milk is perhaps the most contentious. Supporters advocate its calcium-giving properties – according to the Dietitians Association of Australia, dairy foods are the richest source in our diet – while detractors point to troublesome symptoms like bloating, excess mucus and digestive problems. So is the glass of milk half full or half empty?

A healthy diet

As well as calcium, milk contains protein, phosphorus and

vitamins B6 and B12. Adequate consumption of milk and dairy from early childhood and throughout life is said to aid in the development of strong bones and protect you from diseases like osteoporosis in later life. In Australia, 27 per cent of women over 60 are osteoporotic.

According to The Dairy Council in the UK, milk is beneficial in the development of healthy teeth, reduces the risk of cardiovascular disease and diabetes, and as part of a healthy diet can help to reduce blood pressure.

"As core foods, dairy foods can be part of a healthy, balanced

diet," says accredited practising dietitian Denise Griffiths from the Dietitians Association of Australia. "Three serves a day is a good aim for most people, and everyone over the age of two years should eat the lower fat varieties of dairy foods."

Ever thought that drinking milk is unnatural? Even though no other animal consumes the milk of another species (except through human hands), Griffiths says if we were to apply that logic to everything that humans do that other animals don't – including eating honey and eggs – we would find there are very few things we could call natural.

But whether milk is a dietary must-have is another matter.

Life without dairy

At the other end of the dairy spectrum, some experts, like naturopath Johanna Clark, believe milk and other dairy products aren't a vital component of a healthy diet.

"We grow up with mother's milk and think we need to have it in our diet, so we go onto other animal sources," she says. "There's a lot of other foods that we can eat besides dairy. You can get protein, calcium, B6 and B12 from other sources. You can live a healthy life without dairy."

She lists tahini (made from calcium-rich sesame seeds),



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green leafy vegetables, kale, almonds, figs, broccoli and small boney fish such as anchovies, sardines and salmon as equal players in the race to your daily calcium quota.

Processing problems

Much of the conjecture surrounding cow's milk relates to the way it's processed rather than the fresh product itself. Read the carton of milk in your fridge and most likely the contents will have been pasteurised – rapidly heated and cooled to destroy potentially harmful bacteria – and homogenised – where the milk is mixed with the top layer of cream to allow for a longer shelf life.

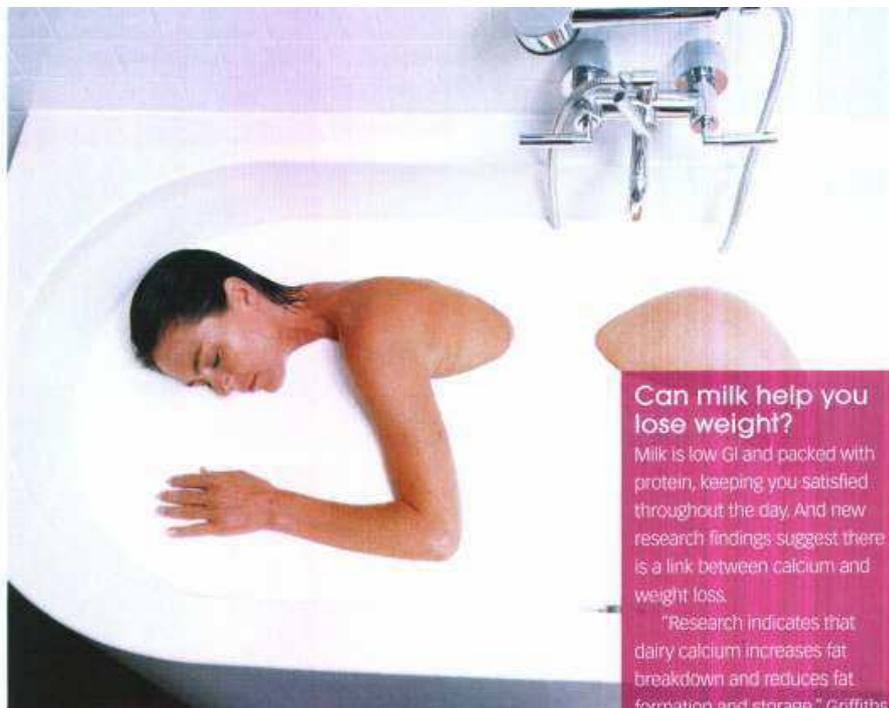
The sale of unpasteurised raw milk (sourced straight from the cow's udder) is illegal in Australia because of hygiene concerns. Raw milk contains numerous pathogens, such as salmonella and E. coli, that can cause illness, hospitalisation and even death. According to Food Standards Australia New Zealand (FSANZ), pasteurisation is the most effective way to control these hazards.

However, fans of raw milk assert that it tastes cleaner and fresher, and is much easier to digest. Pasteurisation may alter the protein structure of milk, which can contribute to poor digestion, arthritis and heart disease. Processing also kills off many of the live cultures in raw milk, limiting its nutritional profile.

During homogenisation, the fats in cream and milk are fragmented, so they're able to enter the bloodstream directly and may accumulate to cause problems with the heart and circulatory systems.

"The homogenisation and pasteurisation process actually alters the protein structure of cow's milk, making it a lot harder to digest," Clark says. "It also reduces our ability to absorb many nutrients, such as calcium.

"Australia has one of the



Can milk help you lose weight?

Milk is low GI and packed with protein, keeping you satisfied throughout the day. And new research findings suggest there is a link between calcium and weight loss.

"Research indicates that dairy calcium increases fat breakdown and reduces fat formation and storage," Griffiths says. "Other research suggests that calcium and other nutrients in dairy food decrease dietary fat absorption from the gastrointestinal tract, which may partly explain why a high dairy calcium diet produces weight loss."

Israeli researchers found calcium and vitamin D could help you lose weight, with people who drank two glasses of the white stuff a day shedding more kilos than those who drank little or no milk.

highest risks of osteoporosis and bone loss, compared to Japan and some of the Asian countries that have the lowest levels of osteoporosis but also the lowest levels of cow's milk consumption."

Similarly, a study published in *The American Journal of Clinical Nutrition* found osteoporotic bone fracture rates are highest in countries that consume the most dairy, calcium and animal protein. The research revealed healthy bones are best achieved by eating plenty of fruit and vegetables, exercising regularly, maintaining healthy vitamin D levels and sourcing calcium from plant sources.

Portion control

If you can tolerate dairy foods without suffering from side effects like bloating and digestive troubles, experts advise consuming two to three serves daily. A serve of dairy equals 250ml of low-fat cheese, two slices of cheese, 200g of yoghurt or 250ml of custard.

Amanda Clark, accredited practising dietitian and author of *Portion Perfection*, recommends kicking off the day with dairy.

"Dairy at breakfast is useful, especially when combined with a high fibre cereal," she says. "A 30g slice of cheese is a useful sandwich filling, and a 200g tub of low-fat yoghurt will fulfil your daily needs."

If dairy isn't your best friend or you're considering a vegan diet, there are other options. FSANZ is reviewing its stance on raw milk, but in the meantime you will need to look to other varieties of animal milk or plant sources.

Johanna Clark recommends organic unhomogenised cow's milk and A2 milk, both of which are available in supermarkets. A2 refers to beta-casein proteins found in milk sourced from older species of cows.

"Normally milk containing both A1 and A2 proteins is mixed during packaging, but A2 has been identified as potentially less allergenic and has been kept separate by some manufacturers to create A2 milk," Amanda Clark says.

Many people find they are better able to tolerate A2 milk, but according to Griffiths there are no human clinical trials to demonstrate that A2 milk provides

any additional health benefits to regular milk.

Ultimately, the answer to the dairy dilemma is personal. Drink up in sensible portion sizes if dairy agrees with your body. If you have trouble digesting cow's milk – or even if you don't – try goat's, sheep's, soybean or almond milk. Judge how you feel after consuming each variety and adjust your consumption accordingly.

And if you prefer to bypass the dairy aisle, stock your trolley with sufficient quantities of green leafy vegetables, bony fish and sesame seeds. The glass is certainly half full, but it's up to you to decide the contents. *

PHOTOGRAPHY: THINSTOCK



Surgery woes even before budget

ELECTIVE surgery in Tasmania had been under pressure even before the latest budget cutbacks, the Health and Human Services Department's annual report shows.

The report, tabled in the House of Assembly yesterday, said Tasmania had been unable to demonstrate consistent improvements in the waiting times for patients awaiting admission from the list.

This was despite significant increases in the volume of



There has been no progress on waiting times for elective surgery patients, the Health Department says.

elective surgery admissions in recent years and improved waiting times for patients admitted from the waiting list.

The department attributes this partly to a large volume of long-waiting patients and categorisation practices which

create unmanageable lists of patients who should be treated within 90 days.

It identified elective surgery, along with emergency department care, as a "key pressure point" in public hospitals.

"Waiting times are a major

cause of concern about our hospital and health system," the report reads.

Bass Liberal MHA Michael Ferguson yesterday tabled a petition in the House of Assembly signed by almost 1000 people opposing health budget cuts.

"The petition calls on the government to protect health services at the Launceston General Hospital, including elective surgery and acute care beds, from cuts and instead make savings in other non-essential areas," he said.

He said elective surgery waiting list patient Christine Taylor organised the petition.

Health Minister Michelle O'Byrne has maintained that patients will continue to be managed by clinicians, not politicians.

— LORETTA JOHNSTON



Pets welcome at festival

The fourth Blacktown City Pet Festival will be held at the Animal Holding Facility, Prospect, on Sunday, October 30, 10am-2pm. The festival aims to raise awareness about responsible pet ownership. The day will include free microchipping, vet checks, dog training, obedience demonstrations, a petting farm, animal education programs and face painting for the children. You can also adopt an animal from the Animal Holding Shelter (AHS). Blacktown Kennel Club president Ron Probert has hosted dog obedience lessons at the festival for the past four years. "We will be showing our obedience training techniques to people at the festival once again," Mr Probert said. "We will also be offering free obedience training for one month to anyone who adopts a dog from the shelter." Also featuring at the festival is Debra Harris who owns Blacktown Aussie Pooch Mobile Dog Wash. She will volunteer her time to groom animals held at the AHS. "We want the animals to look their best so they have the chance to be adopted," Ms Harris said. Entry is free and residents are encouraged to bring their pets which must be collared and on a lead at all times.

**Details: Animal Holding Facility,
 9839 6161 or
www.blacktown.nsw.gov.au.**