

CHEESE MARKET NEWS

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Guest editorial/opinion:

The science of losing weight

By Joseph O'Donnell, executive director, California Dairy Research Foundation

Each year around this time I like to write about the need to tighten the belt after a busy (and fattening) holiday season. It may sound like a broken record but it's easy to fall off the healthy eating bandwagon when you're surrounded by high-calorie treats. Unless you were highly disciplined over the past few months, you're probably carrying around the results of one too many eggnogs like the rest of us. Fortunately, or unfortunately, there is no end to the number of experts out there ready to show us how to take off those unwanted pounds and achieve the body of our dreams — for a price.

Before you buy into the latest diet book, video or program, however, take a good look at the nutrition behind the message. Most fad diets preach extremes — from eating only protein to eliminating yellow foods or drinking liquids for weeks on end. Any diet that promotes drastic dietary changes in any direction may work in the short term but can have a negative health impact in the future. What's the key? It's not rocket science. Burn more calories than you eat and stick to the tried and true concepts of moderation and exercise.

It's easy to say but in our go, go, go lifestyles, not always easy to do. Fortunately, for those of us looking to keep trim while still enjoying tasty, convenient food, there's been a lot of good news lately about the role of dairy in controlling our weight. We've always known that milk "does a body good"... now we're finding that milk, cheese and yogurt, when coupled with a balanced, reduced calorie diet, may play a greater role in weight management than we imagined.

According to recent research cited by the National Dairy Council's "Healthy Weight with Dairy" campaign (www.healthyweightwithdairy.com), the nutrients found in dairy — including but not limited to calcium — may provide a host of benefits including the reduction of body fat and acceleration of weight and fat loss in a calorie-restricted diet as well as the regulation of body weight. This is good news indeed for a country suffering from an obesity crisis.

And this is with the products we already know and love. It's common knowledge that we need calcium in our diet and that milk and other dairy products are great delivery vehicles for calcium as well as protein and other essential nutrients. There's more to it than that, however. There are components in milk that work toward maintaining a

normal weight and we're at the forefront of discovering what these components might be. When we do, watch out — the possibilities are endless.

Here's where this great breakthrough in dietary science will come into play — with customized diet plans tailored to specific needs. If you thought it was cool having a personal trainer, how about a diet based on your personal physiology? It's not as farfetched as it seems.

The milk genome project, an international, Internet-based data management system that will enable the global dairy industry to understand the role of all components of milk in the delivery of health and nutrition, is underway. What that means for the average "Joe" like myself is the future ability to buy products with specific health benefits — from regular dairy foods to foods with specialized dairy ingredients or dairy-based components.

This applies to probiotics, the health promoting bacteria, as well. We've talked about probiotics for years. Outside of the United States, products containing probiotic bacteria are selling like hot cakes. For the future, however, genetic technology will play a major role in understanding probiotic cultures in order to determine which strains deliver the most appreciated and marketable attributes and how to utilize milk as the delivery vehicle.

So when you're getting rid of that last slice of holiday fruitcake, don't forget to use a glass of the lowfat white stuff to wash it down ... it's a good investment in your health.

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