

STRENGTHENING COMMUNITIES

Want a Slim Waist? Just Say Moo.

Obesity and its complications consume about 10 cents of every U.S. health care dollar and cause as many as 300,000 deaths per year. Helping youths develop good eating and exercise habits is a crucial step in stemming the tide of weight-related costs and mortality, because overweight children and adolescents are more likely to become overweight adults. Unfortunately, in the past 20 years, the prevalence of overweight American kids and teens has nearly tripled. The same period has seen a marked rise in the popularity of soda and non-citrus juices and a sharp decline in milk consumption. A CTAHR research project indicates that these three trends are related.

A study by Rachel Novotny and colleagues found that O'ahu girls ages 9–14 who consume just half the recommended allowance of three daily servings of dairy products have lower weight and girth than do girls who eat even fewer dairy servings. For girls at the same growth stage who are equally active and eat the same number of calories, drinking one more cup of milk or eating another small piece of cheese translates to weighing about two pounds less and having about half an inch less of belly fat. Calcium from non-dairy products didn't yield the same results, suggesting that dairy's slimming effect isn't caused by calcium alone. Girls who drank soda in addition to increased dairy had slimmer waistlines but not lower weight. Novotny's findings on the benefits of dairy are consistent with data from other investigators who looked at preschoolers and adults of all ages. So, whether your bones are young and growing, or not-so-young and at risk of thinning, a glass of milk may help you stay slim. Just don't go crazy with the cookies.

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