

SUGARY DRINKS CAN BE UNHEALTHY, BUT IS COW'S MILK UNHEALTHY, TOO?

By Mike Ochs

The debate continues as to whether chocolate milk should be served in school cafeterias. Many experts argue that kids shouldn't drink sugary beverages. But some say that kids probably shouldn't drink any cow's milk at all.

Cow's milk already has some sugar in it, about 12 grams of sugar. Flavored milk can contain up to 30 grams of sugar. These sugars have no nutritional value, says Rip Esselstyn, firefighter, triathlete and author of a dietary cookbook, *The Engine 2 Diet*.

"And because simple carbohydrates are digested so quickly," Esselstyn writes, "any excess sugar is converted into fat."

Not only can simple sugars contribute to obesity, Esselstyn says, but also too much of them can lead to other health problems, such as diabetes.

Some cities have started to take action in limiting the amount of sugary drinks people can buy. In 2012, the New York City Board of Health approved a ban on the sale of large sugary drinks. The ban was the first of the kind in the United States.

New York City Mayor Michael Bloomberg was among those people who agreed with the ban. He thought the ban would help New Yorkers live healthier lives.

"This is the single biggest step any city, I think, has ever taken to curb obesity," Bloomberg said. "We believe it will help save lives."

Some experts go even further than just saying that sugary milk is bad for kids. They say that cow's milk itself—with or without sugary flavoring—is also unhealthy.

These experts say that milk is high in cholesterol and saturated fat. People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals, or PETA, agrees that milk can have short and long term effects on health. In the short term, high levels of cholesterol and saturated fat can lead to obesity and diabetes, PETA says. But in the long term, cholesterol and saturated fat can lead to heart disease and cancer.

In 2009, the Physicians Committee for Responsible Medicine (PCRM) also

wrote about milk. "Milk's main selling point is calcium, and milk-drinking is touted for building strong bones in children," they wrote. "However, clinical research shows that dairy products have little or no benefit for bones."

Dr. Frank A. Oski, the former Director at the Department of Pediatrics at Johns Hopkins University, agrees. "The fact is: the drinking of cow milk has been linked to iron--deficiency anemia in infants and children," he says. "It has been named as the cause of cramps and diarrhea in much of the world's population, and the cause of multiple forms of allergy as well."

Anti-milk supporters say kids can get calcium from plenty of other foods. Esselstyn offers a whole list of calcium-rich foods to eat instead of drinking milk. He says that people can eat green leafy vegetables, nuts, oranges, kidney beans, lima beans, whole grains, lentils, raisins, broccoli, kale, celery, tofu and romaine lettuce, to name a few.

So what is the alternative to drinking cow's milk? Some say that low-fat milk substitutes, such as soymilk, are perfectly good. But there are plenty of other substitutes, such as almond milk and rice milk.

Dr. Oski, however, says that cow's milk is good for some. "Calves thrive on cow milk. Cow milk is for calves."

Resources

<http://milk.procon.org/view.answers.php?questionID=000803>

<http://milk.procon.org/view.answers.php?questionID=001317>

http://www.nytimes.com/2012/09/14/nyregion/health-board-approves-bloombergs-soda-ban.html?_r=0

Esselstyn, Rip. (2009). *The engine 2 diet: the Texas firefighter's 28-day save-your-life plan that lowers cholesterol and burns away the pounds*. New York, NY: Hatchett Book Group.