

White Poison: The Horrors of Milk

by Shanti Rangwani, MD

Got milk? If not, then thank your lucky stars.

Because if you do, medical research shows that you are likely to be plagued by anemia, migraine, bloating, gas, indigestion, asthma, prostate cancer, and a host of potentially fatal allergies -- especially if you are a person of color.

Ignoring this, the government declares that milk is essential to good health, subsidizes the milk industry to the tune of billions of dollars, and requires milk in its public school lunch programs. And celebrities sporting milk mustaches tell us that milk is rich in proteins, calcium, and vitamins -- and they are very cool to drink it.

They forget to tell you about the dangers lurking in that innocuous-looking glass of white. Once criticized only by naturopaths and vegans, now the health effects of milk are being decried by many mainstream doctors. The supposedly hip milk mustache is in fact a creamy layer of mucus, live bacteria, and pus.

Former Chairman of Pediatrics at Johns Hopkins University, Frank Oski, M.D. even has a book called *Don't Drink Your Milk* which blames every second health problem kids suffer on hormone-ridden commercial milk. Sixty percent of ear infections in kids less than six years of age are milk-induced, and milk consumption is the number one cause of iron-deficiency anemia in infants today according to the American Association of Pediatrics.

But milk is also a racial issue. Almost 90 percent of African Americans and most Latinos, Asians, and Southern Europeans lack the genes necessary to digest lactose, the primary sugar in milk. The milk industry's response is classic: they have launched new campaigns arguing that non-whites can digest milk if they take in small sips during the day. There is a burgeoning industry worth \$450 million a year churning out products designed to minimize lactose intolerance.

Lactose intolerance is the most common "food allergy," but to call it an allergy is to take a white-centric view that trivializes the fact that most of the world's people are not biologically designed to digest milk.

Milk does no body good, but for the vast majority of the world's people -- people of color -- it is a public health disaster.

No other animal drinks cow's milk, not even calves once they are weaned. The late Dr. Benjamin Spock, the U.S.'s leading authority on child care, spoke out against feeding "cow's glue" to children, saying it can cause anemia, allergies, and diabetes and in the long term, will set kids up for obesity and heart disease, the number one cause of death in this country.

Most of milk's much-vaunted protein is contained in casein -- which is also a raw material for commercial glue. Undigested, it simply sticks to the intestinal walls and blocks nutrient absorption.

The mainstream media and the government ignore the medical studies showing that milk is a serious health threat, in part because people of color are the main victims. The institutionalization of racism is highlighted by U.S. Department of Agriculture spokesperson Eilene Kennedy's statement on milk, that the government's recommended food pyramid is intended for "the majority of Americans. It doesn't communicate to all Americans."

The USDA continues to require that school lunch programs include milk with every meal, and recommends that we drink milk for calcium, even though Harvard studies show an increase in osteoporosis and bone-breakage in people who consume milk. It says we should drink milk to prevent heart disease (and is echoed by Larry King) even though saturated fat constitutes 55 percent of milk solids.

The dairy lobby perpetrates lies to ensure its profits. It benefits directly from the exaggerated support prices the government shells out for this "health food." The government pays over a billion dollars a year for surplus butter. A General Accounting Office (GAO) study concluded that a reduction in the government price support system would have netted consumers savings of \$10.4 billion from 1986 to 2001. And the USDA pays inflated prices to purchase dairy products for the Women, Infants, and Children (WIC) and federal school lunch programs -- milking the taxpayers and actually getting them to pay for poisoning 26 million school kids.

The milk lobby has whipsawed its way into the highest echelons of power. Staffers under Richard Nixon were indicted for accepting \$300,000 from the dairy lobby for making milk part of the school lunch program.

Dr. Robert Cohen of the Dairy Education Board, a nonprofit organization dedicated to exposing the milk lobby, contends that the dramatic 52 percent rise in asthma deaths among minority kids in New York coincided with the surplus milk, cheese, and butter pumped into them under the USDA's free school lunch and breakfast giveaway programs. The incidence of asthma deaths may be even higher since asthma is not a reportable disease, and asthma deaths are sometimes certified as cardiovascular disease.

There is also a direct link between milk consumption and prostate cancer among African Americans, who have the highest incidence of this disease in the world. A study in Cancer has shown that men who reported drinking three or more glasses of whole milk daily had a higher risk for prostate cancer than men who reported never drinking whole milk.

The controversial Bovine Growth Hormone (BGH) -- banned in most countries -- is pumped into U.S. milch cows to increase annual yield (50,000 pounds of milk per cow today compared to 2,000 pounds in 1959). Milk from cows treated with BGH is likely to contain pus from their udders since the hormone leads to mastitis, or udder infection. BGH use results in a tumor-promoting chemical (IGF-I) that has been implicated in an explosive increase of cancer of the colon, smooth muscle, and breast.

The antibiotics dairy farmers use to treat BGH-caused infections in cows appear in their milk and greatly hasten human tolerance to most antibiotics, a potentially life-threatening state of affairs. The Center for Science in the Public Interest reports that 38 percent of milk samples in 10 cities were contaminated with sulfa drugs and other antibiotics.

A fight back is beginning. Protesters picketed New York City Mayor Rudolph Giuliani's planned milk promotion campaign with a photo of the mayor wearing a milk mustache over the caption, "Got Prostate Cancer?" Giuliani (who, like his father, has prostate cancer) dropped the campaign. And doctors from the Physicians Committee for Responsible Medicine (PCRM) persuaded Washington, D.C. Mayor Anthony Williams not to declare May 11 as "Drink Chocolate Milk Day" by presenting evidence that milk is harmful, especially to people of color.

The PCRM -- composed of some of the leading doctors in the U.S. -- has campaigned extensively in the health and consumer press and led a successful legal effort in 1999 to make dairy products optional in the federal food guidelines. The campaign was supported by a number of prominent civil rights organizations and leaders, including the Congressional Black Caucus, the NAACP, Martin Luther King, III, Jesse Jackson, Jr., the National Hispanic Medical Association, and former Surgeon General Joycelyn Elders.

The dairy lobby remains cozy with most medical practitioners to perpetrate its "drink milk" propaganda. However, not one of the 1,500 papers listed in Medicine that deal with milk points to its goodness -- only to the pus, blood, antibiotics, and carcinogens in milk, and the chronic fatigue, anemia, asthma, and autoimmune disorders milk consumption causes.

The time has come for the milk industry to face the kind of scrutiny that the tobacco companies face today. Meanwhile, discard the moo juice.

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