

Is Raw Milk Healthier?

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With the trend in food becoming locally grown and 'natural', raw milk is being promoted by some as being more healthful, better tasting and nutritious than pasteurized milk. A number of people believe since it is 'raw' and 'natural' it is healthier for them. But is it really?

Unfortunately, drinking raw milk can be dangerous, especially for young children, the elderly and all other immune system compromised. Young children are at an increased risk for becoming ill from any bacteria that may be in raw milk.

There is no scientific evidence to suggest that there is any meaningful difference in the nutritional value of pasteurized and unpasteurized milk. *(According to the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, U.S. Food and Drug Administration, Center for Food Safety and Applied Nutrition)* In addition, vitamin D, which is not found in significant amounts in raw milk, is added to processed milk, making it an even more nutritious product. Vitamin D insufficiency and deficiency is a common problem in the United States affecting many Americans, especially those of Hispanic or African American descent. The addition of vitamin D makes pasteurized milk an excellent source of this essential nutrient providing 25% of the daily value in one 8 ounce serving. With that said, you are actually getting more nutrition from pasteurized milk.

If weight gain is a concern; raw milk is about the same as whole milk in terms of fat content and calories. It is recommend that children start drinking reduced fat milk, which has less fat and calories than whole milk, beginning at age two according to American Academy of Pediatrics.

As previous articles have stated, raw milk is milk that has not been pasteurized before consumption. All milk intended for consumption should be pasteurized -- it's a matter of food safety. Since its introduction over a century ago, pasteurization has been recognized around the world as an essential tool for protecting public health. While some dairy farmers drink their own raw unpasteurized milk produced on their farms they should not provide it to the public or visitors. As a Registered Dietitian, I would not drink raw milk or recommend it to anyone.

The dairy industry, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) and the U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA) recommend that no one consume unpasteurized milk. In fact, many states, including Indiana, ban the sale of raw (unpasteurized) milk for human consumption, and federal law prohibits the retail sale of unpasteurized milk across state borders.

Pasteurization is a simple, effective method to kill harmful pathogens. It does not affect the overall nutritional value of milk. Naturally occurring bacteria in raw milk can cause a number of illnesses including tuberculosis, brucellosis, salmonellosis, listeriosis, spontaneous abortions in pregnant women, and food poisoning-like symptoms, some of which have the ability to cause longer-term negative health impacts.

Dairy products are among the most tested and regulated foods in this country. In addition to the extensive and rigorous safety and quality tests that dairy foods go through before they reach the grocery store, dairy farms, and plants must meet stringent federal and local regulations, including those developed by the U.S. Department of Agriculture, FDA and state regulatory agencies.