Why you should reach for that glass of milk

BY JILLIAN SEE

High in calcium and good for building strong bones — those are undisputed facts of milk. Not much has changed since a 2010 report by the Health Promotion Board stated that 50 per cent of Singaporeans do not consume milk daily despite knowing its nutritional benefits.

A study on milk consumption here found that adults aged 18 to 50 do not find it important to drink milk. However, this can lead to an increased risk of osteoporosis when they are older.

Study author Kalpana Bhaskaran said: “The lack of motivation among adult Singaporeans to change their daily diets despite being presented with evidence of the benefits of milk in preventing chronic diseases such as osteoporosis and diabetes is particularly alarming.

“This is especially worrisome, our rapidly ageing society, when one in four Singaporeans above age 65 will develop a chronic disease.”

Here are six commonly held beliefs about milk debunked, so you have more reason to start drinking.

1. Milk is fattening

According to the study by Dr Kalpana, Singaporeans think that milk is 46 per cent fat. Fact: The fat content of whole (full cream) milk is less than 4 per cent. Whole milk has around 4g of fat per 100ml. Milk also contains proteins and carbohydrates to keep you satiated. The next time you are feeling peckish, have a cup of milk.

2. Ultra-heated (UHT) milk is not as nutritious as fresh milk

Do not look down on UHT milk; it is cheaper than fresh milk, has a longer shelf life and does not require refrigeration until you open the pack. More importantly, it is no less nutritious than fresh milk. UHT milk is heated above 135 deg C for one to two seconds so that the beverage can last for several months without spoiling, but most nutrients in UHT milk are retained.

3. Lactose in milk is bad for digestion

Lactose is a prebiotic that promotes growth of good gut bacteria for a healthy digestive tract. It has a slow-releasing sugar, which means you will not get blood sugar spikes. This is why milk is great for diabetics and as a pick-me-up.

4. I am lactose-intolerant, so I cannot drink milk

Lactose intolerance is the inability to digest lactose properly, due to a deficiency of the lactase enzyme. People who are lactose-intolerant experience stomach discomfort such as bloating and tummy aches after consuming milk and dairy products. But lactose-free milk is available at most supermarkets.

5. Adults do not need as much milk as kids

The recommended calcium intake for children and adults are comparable. The Health Promotion Board recommends that adults aged 19 to 50 should consume 800mg calcium daily, while adolescents aged 10 to 18 should have 1,000mg. An easy way to hit your daily requirement is to drink a cup of milk before or after each meal.

6. I can get my calcium from other sources

There are many alternatives to get your calcium. But you will need to consume excessive portions of these foods to hit your recommended intake of calcium in one day:

- Three tablespoons of anchovies has 560mg of sodium — that is more than a third of your daily sodium limit (1,500mg).
- Spinach
- Anchovies
- Red beans
- Salmon
- Vegetable

There are many alternatives to get your calcium. But you will need to consume excessive portions of these foods to hit your recommended intake of calcium per day.

A 250ml cup of milk provides 300mg calcium. In contrast, you will need to consume the following amounts of these foods to get your cup’s worth:

- Spinach: 16 servings
- Red beans: 10 servings
- Anchovies: 3 tablespoons

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