



## **FACT SHEET:**

### **Dairy and Dietary Racism**

#### **What is Dietary Racism:**

Dietary racism is a social construct built by a racial majority that assumes the food the majority consumes affects other races and cultures in the same way. This mindset often leads to actions that are meant to enhance the health of the majority at the (often unintended) expense of the minority. Dietary racism is often an unconscious bias. At Switch4Good, we strive to educate the majority about how their actions affect others and empower the minority to take a stand for their health.

#### **Dairy & Dietary Racism:**

Sixty-five percent of the global population is lactose intolerant, but there is a discrepancy between races. People of Northern European descent tend to be lactose persistent—they have little to no trouble digesting lactose and, therefore, dairy products.

Blacks, Asians, Native Americans, Latinx, and Ashkenazi Jews experience higher rates of lactose intolerance, ranging from 70-95 percent. When those who are lactose intolerant consume any kind of dairy, they can experience a range of mild to severe symptoms including gas, bloating, diarrhea, stomach pain, and other gastrointestinal distress.

In the United States—where Caucasians are not only in majority but hold a significant portion of the political power—dairy is considered a health food by both public and private agencies. In essence, the lactose-persistent white majority is making nutritional decisions for the entire population without taking into account the harmful effects dairy has on BIPOC communities. This is dietary racism.

#### **Examples of Dairy and Dietary Racism:**

- Coffee shops like Starbucks and others charge extra for non-dairy milk, forcing BIPOC, lactose intolerant customers to choose a beverage that will make them sick or pay the toll
- The 2020-2025 US Dietary Guidelines recommends three servings of dairy for all Americans, despite the fact that it can make millions of people sick.

- The United States Olympic and Paralympic Committee promotes milk and other dairy products to its athletes and the general public. It does this by placing an emphasis on dairy in Olympic training centers and capitalizing on its athletes' success to market milk as a necessity for Olympic hopefuls. The organization does not explain to its athletes or the public that millions are negatively affected by these dairy products.
- School children who participate in the National School Lunch program must provide a doctor's note to exempt themselves from taking a carton of milk in the lunch line. This federal law does not take into account the diversity of the children within this program nor the fact that millions are lactose intolerant; therefore, the law encourages students to consume a product that will make them sick.
- In an attempt to support its claim that chocolate milk is an optimal post-workout recovery beverage, the dairy industry heavily relies on a self-funded study that only included seven white male participants. The results from these seven white men are intended to represent the entire American population.

These are just five of the many examples of dietary racism within America. Dietary racism is not always intentional; in fact, it often occurs out of ignorance, but that does not make it an acceptable practice.

**Switch4Good stands to abolish dietary racism when it comes to dairy. For our most recent work on the issue, visit our [Impact page](#).**