



FACT SHEET: Dairy's Impact on Athletic Performance

In the past few years, we have seen multiple major league athletes go dairy-free to lengthen their professional careers—from Tom Brady to Kyrie Irving to 6 top players on the LA Dodgers. But how does dropping dairy lengthen an athlete's career? Here's what we know:

- One 8 ounce glass of cows' milk contains proteins and other foreign components, including sugars such as Neu5gc, that many people's bodies do not recognize, initiating an immune response, which results in inflammation.^(1,2) Additionally, cows' milk is the main dietary source of the sugar molecule D-galactose which has been linked to inflammation and oxidative stress.^(3,4) Chronic inflammation is associated with a host of diseases and health-related issues, but it is also the greatest inhibitor of recovery from intense training, which presents a huge problem for athletes.
- An athlete relies on endothelial cell function and increased blood flow to produce premium outputs, but dairy products contain high quantities of saturated fats, which can constrict blood vessels and impede blood flow to working muscles,⁽⁵⁾ setting the stage for poor performance.^(5, 6)
- Cows' milk and other dairy foods are low in antioxidants, which are necessary for combating exercise-induced free radicals.⁽⁷⁾ If not eliminated, these inflammatory free radicals can cause lasting damage to our cells, prolonging recovery and increasing the risk of chronic diseases.⁽⁸⁾ Plant-based foods have 64 times more antioxidants compared to animal foods,⁽⁷⁾ meaning a diet rich in plants will have more power to decrease inflammatory markers.⁽⁹⁾
- A plant-based diet, free of dairy foods, is high in omega-3 fatty acids which can help reduce inflammation and swelling due to their anti-inflammatory properties.⁽⁹⁾ They may also positively influence muscle mass and function, plus enhance recovery in athletes.^(10,11)
- We are all born milk drinkers. As babies, our bodies produce the enzyme lactase, which breaks down lactose—a sugar in mammalian breast-milk—into the simpler sugars glucose and galactose. As we grow up and no longer have a need for breast milk, the production of lactase plummets for the majority of humans (estimated up to 68% of the global population)⁽¹²⁾ leading to the development of lactose intolerance, the inability to properly digest the lactose sugar in cows' milk. Symptoms of lactose intolerance include bloating, stomach cramping, diarrhea, and constipation, which are all going to be a serious detriment to an athlete trying to reach the top step.⁽¹³⁾

References:

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