

### **3. Milk may protect against bowel cancer**

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A study on the dairy-eating habits of more than half a million people suggests that drinking milk may protect against bowel cancer. Colon cancer is now the third most common cancer in the world. Almost a million people are diagnosed with the disease each year. Research has long hinted at a connection between calcium and reduced colorectal cancer risk. Animal studies have shown that calcium, an important signalling molecule for colon cell organisation, can slow cell growth in the intestinal lining and limit early stage tumour development. A previous study showed that diarrhoea-causing infections also seem to impede the cancer's progress possibly because they trigger a massive influx of calcium to gut cells. According to a survey conducted at the Harvard Medical School, US; it has been found that people who drank at least one 250 ml glass of milk a day were 15 per cent less likely to get colorectal cancer than people who drank almost none. Cheese and yoghurt had only weak effects, probably because people ate much less of them. Overall calcium consumption, which included supplements, was also associated with decreased risk to a point. After about 1000 mg of daily calcium – around three large glasses of milk – the benefits levelled off.

Calcium is involved in many functions in the body. We need to understand the full range of health effects before making recommendations. High levels of calcium have also recently been linked to prostate cancer.

But, the key to preventing colon cancer is lifestyle. The bottom line is, if you eat fat and don't exercise, you're at risk for developing colon cancer. Linking calcium into that is difficult as epidemiological research has yet to conclusively link eating calcium-rich foods with a decreased colon cancer risk – probably because most studies have been small and lack the statistical power to detect the moderate effects of dietary calcium.

But as of my personal experience a glass of warm milk before going to bed definitely decreases acidity and helps one to have a good night sleep.

#### **References:**

1. Wu, K., Willett W. C, Fuchs C. S. et al. Calcium intake and risk of colon cancer in women and men. *Journal of the National Cancer Institute*. 94 (6), 437-446. 2002
2. Gosline A. *The New Scientist*, 07 July '04