



Released: 01/15/2004

Report Projects \$200 Billion in Healthcare Cost Savings

A new report published in the American Journal of Hypertension suggests that eating 3 - 4 servings of dairy each day as part of a healthy diet could lead to healthcare cost savings of more than \$200 billion over five years, and \$26 billion in the first year alone.

The report, which takes into account approximately 100 studies spanning two decades, is one of the first to analyze how small diet changes may contribute to significant healthcare cost savings and a healthier population.

The authors evaluated the effects of increasing dietary calcium to recommended levels, mainly through dairy foods. They found strong scientific evidence that dairy foods may play a role in reducing the risk of nine common diseases and conditions, at least one of which affects most Americans, including: obesity, hypertension, type 2 diabetes, coronary artery disease, stroke, nephrolithiasis (kidney stones), osteoporosis, colorectal cancer, and pregnancy-related complications.

Treating these common conditions requires about \$264 billion in direct healthcare costs annually.

"Small changes will make a big difference. The science suggests that even if a very small percentage – say 15 percent of the population – would increase its daily intake of milk, cheese or yogurt, the healthcare system would begin realizing savings immediately," said co-author David A. McCarron, MD, FACP, Department of Nutrition at the University of California, Davis. "Getting enough dairy each day could benefit all Americans by reducing their risk for several common disorders, reducing healthcare costs and likely lowering their insurance premiums."

The report projects that if Americans eat enough dairy each day as part of a healthy diet, there will be a significant impact on America's public health pocketbook by reducing total healthcare costs for the major diseases and conditions by 10 percent after just one year; 15 percent over five years. Select results include:

Hypertension: reduce prevalence 40 percent in one year; reduce costs \$14 billion in one year, \$70 billion over five years;

Obesity: reduce prevalence 5 percent in one year, 25 percent over five years; reduce costs \$2.5 billion in one year, \$37.5 billion over five years;

Type 2 diabetes: reduce prevalence 5 percent in one year, 25 percent over five years; reduce costs \$2.5 billion in one year, \$37.5 billion over five years; and

Osteoporosis: reduce fracture risk 20 percent in one year; reduce costs \$3.5 billion in one year, \$14 billion over five years.

"It's very straightforward: to help prevent chronic diseases, incorporate 3 - 4 servings of nutrient-rich dairy each day as part of a healthy diet and lifestyle," said co-author Robert P. Heaney, MD, FACP, FACN, Osteoporosis Research Center at Creighton University, Omaha.

The authors analyzed the health impact of adequate dietary calcium intake based on published scientific evidence. The findings build on the theory that it is more than the calcium in dairy that provides a nutritional source of disease prevention; it is the full nutritional profile of dairy foods, which includes proteins, multiple minerals, vitamins, carbohydrates and essential fatty acids.

To project risk reduction, the authors used percentages from the referenced studies, and then cut them by 50 percent to be conservative. To project healthcare cost savings, the authors referenced recent data published by public and private health organizations.

Dairy provides a unique package of calcium and protein plus other nutrients essential to health such as phosphorus, potassium, vitamins D, A and B12, riboflavin and niacin. A significant body of scientific research suggests that getting your calcium requirements from dairy foods may help reduce the risk of chronic diseases such as osteoporosis, hypertension and obesity.