

Raw Milk

Are there any benefits?

I heard that raw milk might be a healthier choice than pasteurized milk. Is this true?

There is no evidence that raw milk has any health or nutritional benefits. ¹ In fact, the opposite is true. Pasteurized milk is a much healthier choice because you can enjoy all the nutritional benefits of milk without the risk of getting seriously or fatally ill. Pasteurization does not affect the nutritional value of milk. ^{1,2,3} Pasteurized milk has the additional health advantage of added vitamin D (raw milk contains virtually no vitamin D).

Why is raw milk unsafe?

Like most uncooked, unpasteurized, and unwashed foods, raw milk can be a medium for disease-causing organisms (known as pathogens) such as E. coli, salmonella, tuberculosis, and listeria. Listeriosis can cause miscarriage in pregnant women. Many people across Canada, including people in British Columbia, got seriously ill as a result of drinking raw milk. While many of these cases occurred before 1991 when it became illegal to sell raw milk in Canada, cases of serious illness related to drinking raw milk are still reported today. ⁴ This could be prevented by pasteurizing milk, just as one would wash vegetables and fruits, or cook meat to an appropriate temperature to reduce the risk of illness from pathogens.

But isn't raw milk easier to digest?

Some people believe that raw milk is more digestible because it contains “live” enzymes and probiotics that can help with digestion. To date, there is no evidence showing that raw milk has a beneficial probiotic profile or is better tolerated by people with lactose intolerance. ⁵ Enzymes that may be present in raw milk are broken down in the acidic environment of the stomach¹ and are not required for digestion. ^{2,7}

I always drink raw milk and never get sick. Why should I stop?

If you drink raw milk, you may be able to resist becoming ill, but visitors to your house may not. Those who are especially at risk for becoming ill are young children, pregnant women, elderly people and anyone with a weak immune system.⁸

Where can I buy raw milk?

Because raw milk creates a high risk for developing or spreading illness, its sale in Canada is strictly prohibited and Food and Drug Regulations require that all milk available for sale in Canada be pasteurized. In addition, BC law specifies that dairy products cannot be sold or supplied unless the milk has been pasteurized.

What is raw milk?

Raw milk is any milk (such as cow's milk, goat's milk, sheep's milk) that is unpasteurized.

What is pasteurization?

Pasteurization is important for food safety⁶ and is one of the most beneficial measures to protect the health of consumers.

How is milk pasteurized?

Milk is pasteurized through the simple process of heating it for a short period of time to destroy any pathogens. This is the same process carried out to ensure safety of many foods and beverages such as honey, apple cider and apple juice. Pasteurization does not alter the nutritional value of milk. ^{1,2,3}

If you live in a rural area and have unpasteurized milk at home, the BC Ministry of Health Services recommends pasteurizing it by heating it to 74° C (165° F) or hotter and keeping it at this temperature for at least 15 seconds. Please see HealthLink BC, file #03 for a full description of how to pasteurize safely: <http://www.healthlinkbc.ca>

References:

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