Dietary calcium prevents weight gain

Dietary calcium keeps the weight down, according to a new study, which also suggests that calcium may be particularly good for people genetically predisposed to a high waist circumference.

Dairy producers now have one more reason to rejoice, as yet another study shows that the calcium found in e.g. milk and cheese can keep us slim. It appears that this is especially true for people who are genetically predisposed to a high waist circumference.

The study was carried out by researchers at the Institute of Preventive Medicine at Frederiksberg Hospital, Denmark.

"We observed a general association between dietary calcium and reduced weight gain, a finding that adds to the growing body of evidence suggesting that calcium and dairy products may play a role in bodyweight regulation;" says Sofus C. Larsen, who is the lead author of the study, published in the American Journal of Clinical Nutrition.

Somewhat surprisingly, the researchers also found that especially people with a genetic predisposition to excess abdominal fat may benefit from dietary calcium:

"We observed a small and statistically weak tendency indicating that people with genetic predisposition to a large waist circumference may get some extra benefits from a diet rich in calcium if they wish to reduce their waist circumference. However, replication of this finding in other studies is needed before anything definitive can be concluded."

No miracle cure for obesity

The slimming effect of calcium has been demonstrated in several Danish and international studies. It is believed that calcium binds fatty acids in the gastrointestinal tract, thus decreasing the absorption of fat, which can lead to weight loss over time.

"In general, our and previous studies do not show that calcium has a great effect on weight loss. The association is very moderate, but even though you find a modest correlation, there may well be sub-groups in the population for whom this correlation does not apply, and some for whom the correlation is stronger. This is, simply speaking, what we are looking at," says Larsen, adding that scientists have so far only scratched the surface in this area.

The overall objective of the study was to examine whether dietary calcium has a greater effect on some people than on others. The researchers therefore decided to take a closer look at whether the strength of the correlation between calcium intake and the resulting change in weight and waist circumference depends on the number of obesity-related gene variants.

"We will have some interesting prospects if we manage to identify some dietary factors that are particularly beneficial to people who are predisposed to obesity," says the researcher.
The new study did not, however, find any evidence that calcium has a significant preventive effect on weight gain in people with a high genetic predisposition to obesity.

A small piece in a big puzzle

The new study is just a small part of a large project, GENDINOB (Gene-diet Interactions in Obesity) [9], where several researchers are investigating the effect of genes and diet on obesity.

"Very little is known about how the obesity-related gene variants actually function. We currently only know that they are associated with obesity. Other studies have shown that some of these gene variants may be affected by our lifestyle," says Larsen, who hopes the new findings will inspire further research into this field.

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Read the Danish version of this article at videnskab.dk [10]

A diet rich in calcium is particularly good for people who are genetically predisposed to a high waist circumference. (Photo: <a href="http://www.shutterstock.com/" target="_blank">Shutterstock</a>) [11]

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Sofus C. Larsen


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