

## For the healthiest milk, make sure it's not 'raw'

By Teddi Nicolaus

**F**rom kale to kombucha, food trends come and go. These can be healthy choices for many, but just because something is trending on social media or elsewhere doesn't always mean it fits your own unique nutritional needs. Even worse, some food trends can make you very sick. One of those is drinking raw milk or eating products made from it.

Raw milk comes from animals such as cows, sheep or goats. The word "raw" means that the products have not undergone a crucial heat treatment called pasteurization. Developed by scientists Louis Pasteur and known as one of the great public health achievements of the 20th century, pasteurization is an important safety step that kills harmful disease-causing bacteria, viruses and parasites in milk, making them much safer to consume.

More than a century ago, "prior to pasteurization, milk made lots of people sick and killed children especially," says Marion Nestle, emerita professor of nutrition, food studies and public health at New York University. "Pasteurization fixed that problem."

Thanks to pasteurization, that glass of cold milk you poured into your cereal gave you all the great nutritional benefits of milk, but did not expose you to dangerous germs.

Scientific research links raw milk and raw milk products such as yogurt, ice cream and soft cheeses to a host of germs. Those

include dangerous foodborne illnesses caused by salmonella, E. coli, Listeria and campylobacter. The germs can come from unclean milking equipment, the animal's own poop, infected cows, soil, water and more. Good practices on farms can help reduce the contamination, but there are no guarantees.

Symptoms of foodborne illness caused by raw milk include diarrhea, vomiting, fever, aches and stomach cramps, and can range from mild to deadly. Older adults, young children, pregnant women and other people with weakened immune systems can develop severe or even life-threatening symptoms.

Despite the dangers, the sale of raw milk is legal in many states and consumption appears to be increasing. Some people erroneously claim it can do everything from boost your immune system to ward off asthma. But there are no facts to support these claims and disease outbreaks caused by raw milk are on the rise. In fact, one study estimated that 800 times more people get sick from raw dairy products than from pasteurized products.

Even if you've had raw milk in the past and didn't get sick, there's always a chance that you will. It's just not a chance worth taking, food safety experts say.

"The problem is that you can't tell whether raw milk is safe in advance of drinking it, even if it's tested," Nestle says.

"When it's not, its pathogenic contaminants can make people really sick or kill them."

The best decision for your health and the health of your family is to only use pasteurized milk, the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention says.

### Know the raw facts

Raw milk can harbor dangerous germs. It is one of the riskiest foods people can consume. The more times you consume it, the greater the chance you'll get sick. Knowing the facts about raw milk can help keep you and your loved ones safe.

**FACT:** Raw milk **does not** prevent osteoporosis better than pasteurized milk. All milk is rich in calcium, phosphorus, vitamin D and protein, all of which are important for healthy bones.

**FACT:** If you're pregnant, raw milk **is not** healthy for your growing fetus. Pregnant women are especially at risk for getting sick from a germ called Listeria, which is often



>> For more on raw milk risks, visit [www.cdc.gov/rawmilk](http://www.cdc.gov/rawmilk)

found in raw milk and products made from raw milk. Listeria can cause miscarriage, stillbirth, premature delivery and even death of a newborn. Listeria can harm the fetus even if you don't feel sick.

**FACT:** Raw milk **does not** prevent lactose intolerance. People with lactose intolerance lack the enzyme needed to break down lactose during digestion. According to the American Medical Association, all milk, whether raw or pasteurized, contains lactose and can cause lactose intolerance in sensitive people.

**FACT:** Raw milk **is not** better for you. Raw milk and pasteurized share essentially the same nutritional benefits. But raw milk can be a source of foodborne illness, and drinking or eating products made from raw milk can expose you to dangerous germs.

**FACT:** Raw milk is **not safe** to drink. Decades of scientific studies and data from dozens of foodborne illness outbreaks clearly show the dangers associated with the consumption of raw milk.

At the end of the day, keep in mind that even though you've chosen to be safe and use pasteurized milk and dairy products, they still need to be kept cool to keep from spoiling. All milk and dairy products should be refrigerated at 40 degrees or below.

If you or your family member have consumed raw milk and get sick, talk to a health care provider right away.

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