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Healthy cheese - Can cheese really be healthy? A review of the current evidence

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Cheese is a concentrated source of energy, of nutrients such as calcium, but also a source of saturated fat. Because of the saturated fat content of cheese, food consumption guidelines often limit the recommended amount of cheese to a 'matchbox sized' piece, and recommend that those with hypercholesterolaemia limit their consumption. Evidence shows that some older adults limit their consumption for these reasons. However, current evidence suggests that the other compounds present in cheese may offset the cholesterol-raising ability of the saturated fat. A limited number of studies have examined varying levels of acute cheese consumption over periods of time ranging from 3 weeks to three months, and to date have found little evidence of an increase in LDL-cholesterol, while HDL-cholesterol appears to increase in some cases, resulting in a more beneficial lipid profile. Reports suggest that the calcium, together with the proteins in the cheese form cheese-specific complexes that prevent the absorption of fat. More research is needed to more fully characterize these potentially beneficial effects, but research suggests that cheese may in fact be safely consumed by all as part of a balanced diet. Food for Health Ireland is currently examining associations between cheese consumption and a range of metabolic biomarkers in the Irish population to inform future post-prandial studies on the potentially beneficial effects of cheese consumption.

Biography

Emma Feeney completed her PhD in genetics in Nutrition and Genetics in UCD. Following this, she worked in on phase one of FHI, conducting proof-of-principle studies into the post-prandial effects of protein hydrolysates. She then moved to the Sensory Evaluation Center at the Pennsylvania State University in 2012, where she conducted Postdoctoral research examining genetic differences in chemosensation, and the subsequent effect on food liking and food choice. She is currently a Postdoctoral Research Fellow in UCD, funded by Food for Health Ireland, examining the metabolic effects of cheese consumption.

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