

Dietician's Corner

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PASTEURIZED VS RAW MILK

By Amanda Thul, RD, LD

Iowa passed a bill, starting July 1, that would allow farmers to sell raw milk and products made from raw milk to consumers. Many people claim that compared to pasteurized milk, raw milk contains more nutrients, healthy bacteria, and is more natural since it's not "processed." So, is that true? Should we be ditching our milk from the grocery store and seeking farmers selling raw milk? Here is what we know about raw and pasteurized milk.

Raw milk can contain a significant amount of bacteria, that is true. However, the bacteria that can be present is not beneficial and has been linked to causing multiple foodborne illnesses. Illnesses from raw milk can range from mild symptoms of diarrhea and stomach cramping to life threatening. The passed bill does require weekly testing of the cows to ensure they do not contain any infections, but the milk can also be contaminated by coming in contact with feces, bugs, rodents, or other small animals. The handler could also unintentionally contaminate the milk during the collection, packaging, or storage process. These sources of contamination would not be detected from testing the cow or obvious to the consumer.

Pasteurizing milk first started in the late 1800's and became more routine by 1920. Pasteurization was developed at a time when multiple diseases were spread through milk causing illnesses and deaths. A reduction in sickness was seen with pasteurization. Today's method of pasteurizing milk is heating the milk through heated stainless-steel plates until it reaches 161° F for at least 15 seconds and then rapidly cooling it down to a safe temperature of 39° F.

Does this process destroy most of the nutrients? No. The main difference in nutrients between raw and pasteurized milk is vitamin C and vitamin D. Raw milk contains a minimal amount of vitamin C (3.7mg) and this does not survive the pasteurization process. To put this in perspective, 1 cup of strawberries has about 100mg of vitamin C so the little that's in raw milk doesn't make a big difference on total daily intakes. Cow's milk does not naturally contain vitamin D so raw milk will contain minimal amounts while pasteurized milk has vitamin D added which helps our bodies absorb calcium along with other important health benefits.

How about natural vs processed? Milk, even when pasteurized, is a natural source of many essential nutrients to human health. Pasteurization is a great example of how processing a food can make a food safer and with the added vitamin D, more nutritious for us.

As always, it's important to make informed decisions about what we are choosing to feed our bodies.

Have More Questions?

I'd love to help you weed through the nutrition pseudoscience and get to the answer.

Reach me at the hospital at 515-332-7608.

