

[High-fat Dairy Lowers Risk of Heart Attacks](#)

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Ha ha! I love it when nutrition scientists become [confused by the latest research](#). Get this:

Dairy foods are a major source of saturated fat in the diet, which has been associated with heart disease. However, there's some evidence that dairy foods could actually benefit heart health...Dr. Eva Warensjo of Uppsala University and her colleagues note in the *American Journal of Clinical Nutrition*.

See what I mean? They just don't get it! Because they're so indoctrinated with the [false notion](#) that dietary intake of saturated fat increases the risk of heart disease, these people now have a genuine paradox on their hands. How is it possible, they ask, for a food rich in saturated fat to actually decrease the risk of heart disease?

I'll tell you how.

It's because [fat is where it's at](#). Just about everything good in milk is in the fat: the Vitamins A, K2, E, & D, the medium-chain fatty acids, the butyric acid, the omega-3 fatty acids, the conjugated linoleic acid.

Incidentally, the latest study about dairy fat is nothing new. Researchers have been noting this in one way or another for years.

From Dr. Stephan Guyenet, at [Whole Health Source](#):

Contrary to popular belief, full-fat dairy, including milk, butter and cheese, has never been convincingly linked to cardiovascular disease. In fact, it has rather consistently been linked to a lower risk, [particularly for stroke](#). What has been linked to cardiovascular disease is milk fat's replacement, [margarine](#). In the [Rotterdam study](#), high vitamin K2 intake was linked to a lower risk of fatal heart attack, aortic calcification and all-cause mortality. Most of the K2 came from full-fat cheese. In my opinion, artisanal cheese and butter made from pasture-fed milk are the ultimate dairy foods.

From a 2005 [literature review](#) on milk and cardiovascular disease in the EJCN:

In total, 10 studies were identified. Their results show a high degree of consistency in the reported risk for heart disease and stroke, all but one study suggesting a relative risk of less than one in subjects with the highest intakes of milk.

...the studies, taken together, suggest that milk drinking may be associated with a small but worthwhile reduction in heart disease and stroke risk.

...All the cohort studies in the present review had, however, been set up at times when reduced-fat milks were unavailable, or scarce.

And this is just with regular old pasteurized, homogenized, store-bought dairy from industrially raised cows. The benefits *increase* when [the dairy is from pastured cows](#) eating lush, green grass:

Not all dairy is created equal. Dairy from grain-fed and pasture-fed cows differs in a number of ways. Pastured dairy contains more fat-soluble nutrients such as [vitamin K2](#), vitamin A, vitamin E, carotenes and omega-3 fatty acids. It also contains more conjugated linoleic acid, a fat-soluble molecule that has been under intense study due to its ability to inhibit obesity and cancer in animals. The findings in human supplementation trials have been mixed, some confirming the animal studies and others not. In feeding experiments in cows, Dr. T. R. Dhiman and colleagues found the following (1):

Cows grazing pasture and receiving no supplemental feed had 500% more conjugated linoleic acid in milk fat than cows fed typical dairy diets.

Fat from ruminants such as cows, sheep and goats is the main source of CLA in the human diet. CLA is fat-soluble. Therefore, skim milk doesn't contain any. It's also present in human body fat in proportion to dietary intake. This can come from dairy or flesh.

In a recent article from the AJCN, Dr. Liesbeth Smit and colleagues examined the level of CLA in the body fat of Costa Rican adults who had suffered a heart attack, and compared it to another group who had not (a case-control study, for the aficionados). People with the highest level of CLA in their body fat were 49% less likely to have had a heart attack, compared to those with the lowest level (2).

Since dairy was the main source of CLA in this population, the association between CLA and heart attack risk is inextricable from the other components in pastured dairy fat. In other words,

CLA is simply a marker of pastured dairy fat intake in this population, and the (possible) benefit could just as easily have come from vitamin K2 or something else in the fat.

This study isn't the first one to suggest that pastured dairy fat may be uniquely protective. The Rotterdam and EPIC studies found that a higher vitamin K2 intake is associated with a lower risk of heart attack, cancer and overall mortality ([3](#), [4](#), [5](#)).

I know you probably don't consume low-fat dairy, so this is preaching to the choir. But the next time someone tells you that low-fat dairy is healthier for you somehow, you can say "Excuse me? Actually the science indicates that the more dairy fat you eat, the lower your risk of heart disease." And then you can point them to the research.

One of the best dietary sources of dairy fat is found in **ghee**, particularly ghee from pastured cows. Ghee is basically butter (churned dairy fat), with the milk solids & proteins removed so that what's left is a beautiful, amber-colored oil with a rich, fantastic flavor for cooking. It's an ancient fat, supremely delicious, and available online at my [Resources Page](#).

(photo by [smudgechris](#))

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