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The Experts' FORUM

FEATURE ARTICLE:

LOW-CARB, NO-CARB, GOOD-CARB, BAD-CARB

BY HELEN BISHOP-MACDONALD



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This is a good news/bad news story. First, the bad news: Milk and milk products (the regular, non-skimmed variety) have gone through hell. Oh,oh, can't have that, there's dairy in it; on a diet...no more milk; milk is loaded with hormones and antibiotics! You get the picture: the myths about dairy foods could fill a Grimm's Book of Fairy Tales. In fact, many such nonsensical books have been filled with fact-free horror stories.

The good news—and there is good news—is double pronged. First, common sense is slowly coming to the fore and people are beginning to appreciate that a food that has nourished us so well for 10,000 years can't be bad and second (perhaps even more important), recent trends are making milk's top ingredients "must-haves" in food production.

Let's start with the low-carb craze. While the jury is still out on the long-term effectiveness of a weight-reduction diet based on carbohydrate restriction, the fact is that many, many people are experiencing success in dropping excess baggage while following such a regimen. Although the diets are mostly referred to as low carbohydrate or high fat what they actually are, if you do the macronutrient calculations, are higher protein. And that's where

dairy shines—in product formulations looking for a higher protein content. Milk protein concentrate, my friends, is where it's at! There is no better ingredient than milk protein concentrate to bring up the protein content of a product...and at the same time meet consumers' expectations and demands, especially in terms of functionality and price. Ditto for whey—a wealth of ingredients just waiting to be snapped up.

Nipping closely at the heels of the low-carb trend is the valid finding that dieters who have optimum calcium intake are more likely to be successful in the battle of the bulge. There has even been a diet dubbed "The Ice Cream Diet" based on the persuasive research done on calcium and its effect on weight loss. The evidence is pretty clear that dieters who consume insufficient amounts of calcium (which up until lately has included almost every dieter) find their bodies releasing a hormone called calcitriol, which makes them store fat. (Pretty clever on the body's part, I might add, because a low-calcium diet is one of its signals of starvation, so a body intent on survival would come up with a way to store fat in preparation for the coming famine). The more calcium we get, the more efficiently we burn fat, the more successful our attempts at weight loss. Everybody's happy.

Clever food manufacturers are taking advantage of these scientific breakthroughs and insuring that their products are topped up with these dairy ingredients—milk protein concentrate and calcium.

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Not content with merely having a high protein and high calcium content going for it, milk adds to its advantage by being a major contender in the glycemic index sweepstakes. The Glycemic Index (GI) is a scale that ranks carbohydrate-rich foods by how much they raise blood glucose levels compared to a standard food. The standard food is glucose or white bread. Consuming a diet made up mostly of foods with a low GI is thought by most experts to reduce the risk of Type 2 diabetes as well as heart disease and obesity. And guess what...milk and unsweetened yogurt have a low GI and cheese is so low as to not make it to the chart. Products formulated with milk ingredients and low in added sugar and starches, are bound to fit into the low GI category. Watch for the GI diet to be the next major weight loss trend.

So there you have it. Striving for a healthy weight shouldn't be slotted into the "craze" category—and formulating products that help people achieve that goal should be a priority. Of course we know that it's not just calories coming in that we have to worry about, it's also the calories we expend. So Canadians should get off their collective butts and go for a walk, or jump on a two-wheeler! That's what this country needs—more dairy ingredients and