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## Milk Splat

### Dairy Consumption and Risk of Stroke in Swedish Women and Men

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In the present study, Dr Susanna Larsson and her team at the Karolinska Institute in Stockholm, studied a very large group of Swedish men and women for a period of 10 years to determine if the consumption of low-fat dairy foods is associated with a reduction in the incidence of stroke or not. The researchers found that of the nearly 75000 subjects, those who had the highest intakes of low-fat dairy products had the lowest incidence of total stroke and cerebral infarction.

Scientists have suspected for some time that consuming low-fat dairy products such as low- or fat-free milk, yoghurt, and cottage cheese, has a protective effect against stroke and other cardiovascular disorders. Hypertension or high blood pressure is one of the leading, but also preventable, causes of stroke. The Dietary Approaches to Stop Hypertension (DASH) diet, which was developed in the USA, includes low-fat dairy products as its number one component, and it has been producing good results in lowering high blood pressure for more than a decade. Therefore, drinking adequate quantities of low-fat milk and eating plenty of low-fat yoghurt and cottage cheese as prescribed in the DASH diet can be expected to not only lower hypertension, but also to prevent stroke.

In 1997, the subjects in this Swedish study completed a 350 item questionnaire about dietary intake and other lifestyle factors. Over the 10 year period, Dr Larsson and her co-authors, tracked how many of the subjects developed strokes (i.e. 4089 cases). They then compared low-fat dairy food intake with the incidence of strokes in the study group and found that there was a statistically significant inverse association between intake of low-fat dairy and strokes. In other words, those men and women who ate the most low-fat dairy foods, were 12% less likely to develop a stroke and 13% less likely to suffer from cerebral infarction than the subjects who ate the least low-fat dairy. High-fat or full-cream milk and dairy products did not have a protective effect against stroke.

Because this was a powerfully designed study (having a very large sample population; careful recording of food intake; and accurate data on stroke incidence obtained from the Swedish Hospital Discharge Registry), it is evident that drinking low-fat milk and eating low-fat dairy foods, can lower the risk of developing strokes. The low-fat dairy foods mentioned in this report which are available in South Africa, include: fat-free milk, and yoghurt ( $\leq 0,5\%$  fat); low-fat milk, yoghurt and drinking yoghurt ( $\leq 2\%$  fat); and fat-free cottage cheese ( $\leq 1.5\%$  fat).

Dr Larsson and her team suggest that nutrients such as the protein, calcium and vitamin D\* in low-fat dairy products lower blood pressure, combat the metabolic syndrome and protect against strokes. This Swedish study has provided proof that having 3 or more servings of low-fat dairy per day will help to combat hypertension and may prevent you from having a stroke.

\*Due to our sunny climate, the majority of milk products in South Africa are not fortified with vitamin D.

*The full article can be requested from [info@dairy.co.za](mailto:info@dairy.co.za), or visit [www.rediscoverdairy.co.za](http://www.rediscoverdairy.co.za) to join our mailing list. This online portal of the Consumer Education Project of Milk SA features up-to-date, science-based information on dairy products.*

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