



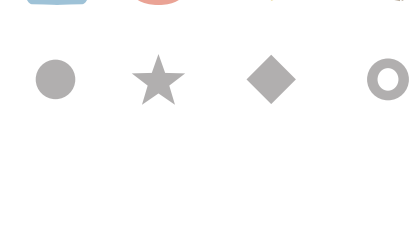
MEDIA RELEASE

An initiative by the Consumer Education Project of Milk SA

The unique health benefits of dairy products

For years, nutrition science has focused on how individual nutrients in foods are linked to health, like calcium being good for bones or saturated fats being a risk factor for heart disease. However, current research reveals that the health effects of what we eat – whether benefits or risks – are related to much more than the sum of a food’s individual nutrients. This is especially true for dairy products, which have unique structures that influence how our bodies digest and absorb specific nutrients. This concept, known as the **dairy matrix**, explains why dairy products often have health benefits that cannot be attributed only to individual nutrients.

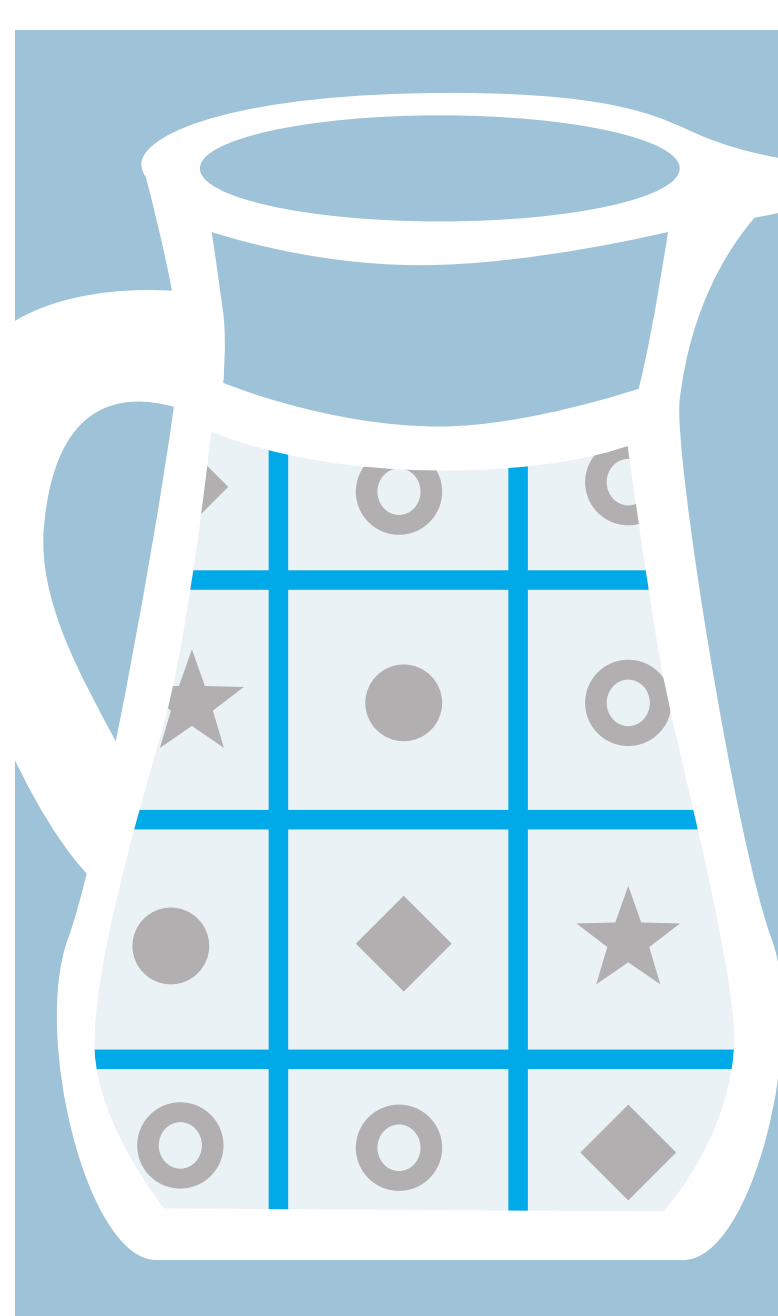
Dairy products provide unique health benefits that go beyond their individual nutrients.



From nutrient science to whole-food science

Although nutrition scientists’ earlier focus on the effects of individual nutrients has helped to identify the importance of vitamins and minerals and established recommended daily intake values, there was limited understanding of how the health effects of whole foods come about. For example, the intake of saturated fats is linked to raised cholesterol levels and subsequently a higher risk of heart disease. Yet, consuming dairy products, which typically contain 65% saturated fats, does not appear to increase the risk of heart disease

Research has since found that the **structure of dairy products** – in other words, how the nutrients are physically positioned to give a dairy product its typical look and feel either as a liquid (milk), a gel (yoghurt) or a solid (cheese) – influences how our bodies digest and absorb the nutrients from dairy.



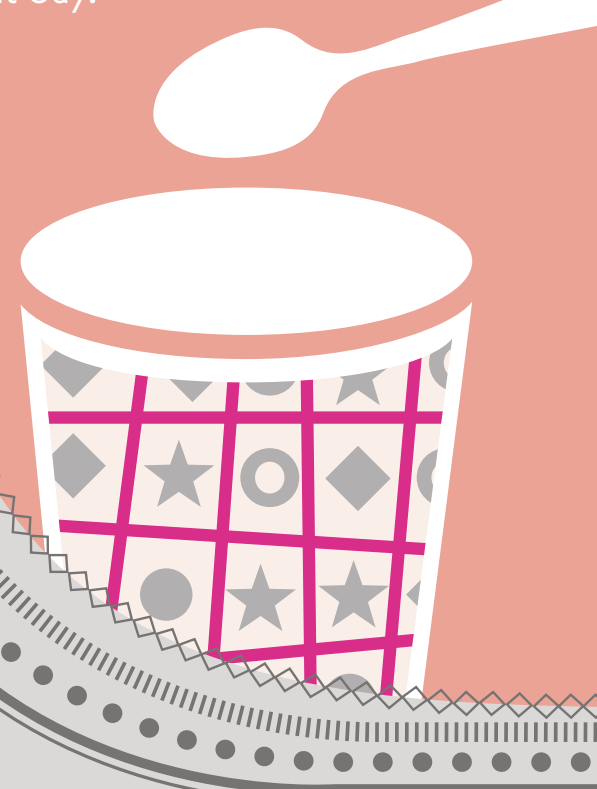
Nutrition science has now moved towards a **food-based focus** to understand how whole foods, rather than just individual nutrients, affect our health. Large studies show that the overall health effects of dairy are different from what would be expected when considering only their individual nutrients.

Health benefits of dairy

Research on dairy consumption has revealed several significant health benefits:

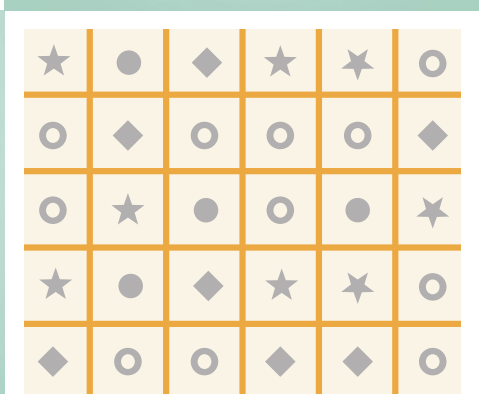
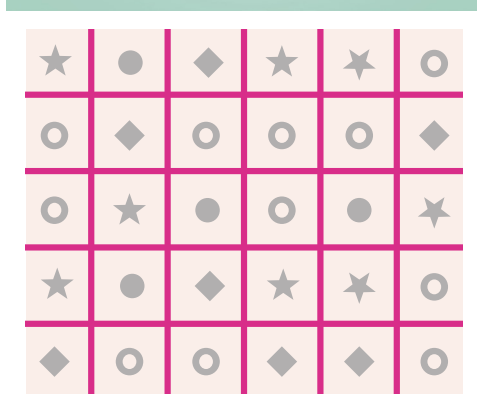
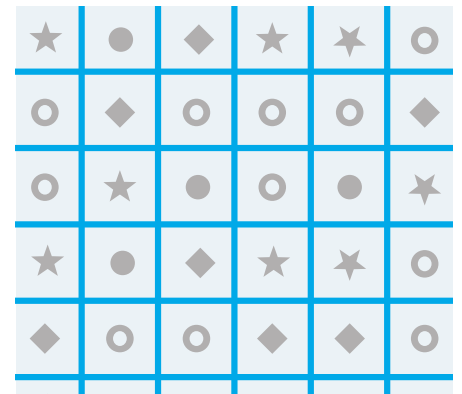
1. Consuming dairy, and particularly low-fat milk and yoghurt, is linked to a **lower risk of type 2 diabetes** (T2D). Studies indicate that having about 80 g of yoghurt daily is associated with a 14% decrease in T2D risk. This protective effect may be because the bacterial cultures used to ferment milk and turn it into yoghurt can enhance gut health and improve insulin sensitivity. These factors help to make you feel full, contribute to better energy distribution, and improve glucose metabolism, all working together to keep the risk of T2D at bay.

- 2. Despite containing saturated fat, dairy products – especially cheese – have been shown to have either a neutral or slightly beneficial effect on heart health. This might be because of the way fat droplets are packaged in the dairy matrix: something called the **milk fat globule membrane** may prevent the increase of harmful cholesterol and so decrease the risk of heart disease.
- 3. Dairy is a rich source of calcium and good-quality protein, and the ratio between calcium and phosphate is ideal for **building and maintaining strong bones** throughout life. The combination of nutrients in dairy and the different structures in which they operate (the dairy matrix) enhance calcium absorption, which means it is used better for forming bone tissue.



Why the dairy matrix matters

These findings challenge conventional dietary advice that focuses solely on nutrient content. Although some guidelines still have an overall warning against all products that contain saturated fats, evidence-based research suggests that whole foods should be evaluated based on their complete structure and health effects, rather than just their nutrient breakdown.



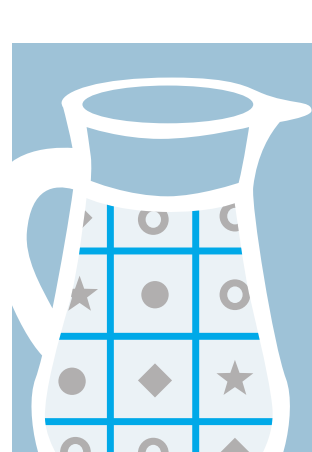
The concept of the **dairy matrix** encourages a more **holistic** approach to nutrition.

Final thoughts

Dairy products provide unique health benefits that go beyond their individual nutrients. The structure of a dairy product affects how it is digested and how its nutrients are absorbed. This impacts overall health in ways that science is still uncovering. As research advances, it’s becoming clear that not all fats are the same, and that the way calcium and protein are incorporated into a product’s structure can explain specific health benefits.

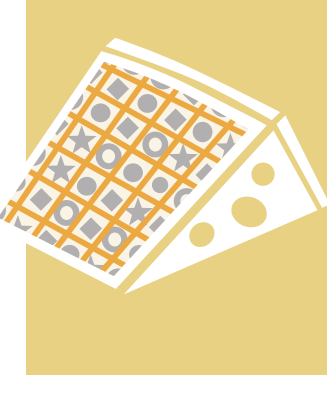
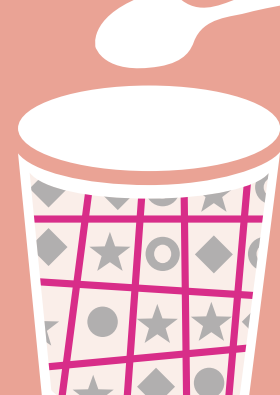
Understanding the food matrix effect can help reshape dietary guidelines, moving beyond the effects of individual nutrients in isolation, and instead focus on how whole foods impact our health. **For dairy lovers, this is good news: milk, cheese and yoghurt are not only tasty but also scientifically proven to be part of a healthy diet.**

Key takeaways



Milk provides a balanced mix of nutrients that support heart, bone and metabolic health.

Yoghurt is a gut-friendly, probiotic-rich food (containing friendly bacteria) that lowers diabetes type 2 risk and boosts immunity.



Cheese supports heart and bone health, without increasing the risk of heart disease.



For dairy ideas and recipes join the Rediscover Dairy Facebook page: www.facebook.com/RediscoverDAIRY

For find out more about dairy’s role on healthy diets, visit www.rediscoverdairy.co.za