

Raw Milk

Are there any benefits?

I heard that raw milk might be a healthier choice than pasteurized milk. Is this true?

No, in fact the opposite is true. Pasteurized milk is a much healthier choice because you can enjoy all the nutritional benefits of milk without the concern of contracting harmful and possibly fatal diseases. Pasteurization does not alter the nutritional value of milk¹ and, pasteurized milk has the additional health advantage of added vitamin D (raw milk contains virtually no vitamin D).

Why is raw milk unsafe?

Like most uncooked, unpasteurized, and unwashed foods, raw milk can be a vehicle for pathogens such as E. coli, salmonella, tuberculosis, and listeria. Listeriosis is especially high risk for pregnant women. Many people across Canada, including people in British Columbia, have become violently ill as a result of drinking raw milk. While many of these cases occurred before Canada's legislation prohibiting the sale or distribution of raw milk in 1991, we are unfortunately still finding cases of serious illness today related to drinking raw milk.² This could be prevented through the simple process of pasteurization, just as one would wash vegetables and fruits, or cook meat to an appropriate temperature to reduce the risk of illness from pathogens.

But isn't raw milk easier to digest?

Some people believe that raw milk is a healthier choice and more digestible because it contains "live" enzymes and probiotics that can aid in digestion. This is not true. Enzymes that may be present in raw milk are broken down in the acidic environment of the stomach. These enzymes are not required for digestion³ and there is no evidence to show a beneficial probiotic profile from raw milk.

I always drink raw milk and never get sick. Why should I stop?

If you drink raw milk, you may be able to resist becoming ill, but visitors to your house may not. You can still transmit pathogens to anyone you come in contact with, placing your family and friends at risk. Those who are especially at risk for becoming ill are young children, pregnant women, elderly people and anyone with a compromised immune system from other illness.

Where can I buy raw milk?

Because raw milk creates a high risk for developing or spreading illness, its sale in Canada is strictly prohibited and Food and Drug Regulations require that all milk available for sale in Canada be pasteurized. Health Canada takes this so seriously that it levies penalties such as heavy fines or jail time to people selling or even giving away raw milk.

Remember, ONLY pasteurized milk is safe milk.

What is raw milk?

Raw milk is any milk (such as cow's milk, goat's milk, sheep's milk) that is unpasteurized.

What is pasteurization?

Pasteurization is important for food safety⁴ and is one of the most beneficial measures to protect the health of consumers. Milk is pasteurized through the simple process of heating milk for a short period of time to destroy any pathogens (disease-causing organisms). This is the same process carried out to ensure safety of many foods and beverages such as honey, apple cider and apple juice. Pasteurization does not alter the nutritional value of milk.

If you live in a rural area and have unpasteurized milk at home, the BC Ministry of Health Services recommends pasteurizing it by heating it to 63° C (145° F) or hotter and keeping it at this temperature for at least 30 minutes. Please see HealthLink BC, file #03 for a full description of how to pasteurize safely: <http://www.healthlinkbc.ca>

References :

1. Haddad GS and Loewenstein M. Effect of several heat treatments and frozen storage on thiamine, riboflavin, and ascorbic acid content of milk. *J Dairy Sci*, 1983. 66(8): p. 1601-6.
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4. Leedom JM. Milk of nonhuman origin and infectious diseases in humans. *Clin Infect Dis*, 2006. 43(5): p. 610-5.