In the battle of the bulge, men and women respond differently to low fat dairy advice

Low fat dairy products are often recommended for people trying to lose weight as they provide less energy and saturated fat than their full fat counterparts.

A recent study completed at the University of Wollongong’s Smart Foods Centre, and published in the prestigious Journal of the Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics found, however, that participants of a weight loss trial did not always benefit from this advice.

In analysing the dietary intake of 86 adults enrolled in a weight loss trial for three months, men tended to reduce their intake of total dairy products rather than increase their intake of low fat dairy alternatives.

In contrast, women successfully consumed reduced full fat dairy foods as recommended, but increased their intake of carbohydrates from dairy products and failed to decrease their overall energy intake from this food group; an important consideration for those consuming these products as part of a weight loss strategy.

In addition, a trend was observed whereby study participants decreased the number of servings they consumed per day following advice to consume reduced fat dairy.

Findings from the study, conducted as part of a research program run by the Illawarra Health and Medical Research Institute (IHMRI), suggest that it may be important to consider the impact of recommending low fat dairy products for those wanting to lose weight, particularly as recent research has failed to find an association between consumption of full fat dairy products and an increased risk of diet-related diseases.

“This may be an effect of the overall dietary balance achieved by those who choose full fat dairy as part of a healthy diet, where a low level of saturated fat intake can still be achieved,” explains Dr Deborah Nolan-Clark, who undertook the study with Smart Foods Centre Director, Professor Linda Tapsell as part of her PhD.

“The findings also emphasise the need for dietary advice relating to low fat dairy products to consider an individual’s food preferences and their total diet,” adds Dr Nolan-Clark, who is now director of Landmark Nutrition; a consulting company in Wollongong, NSW.

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About IHMRI
The Illawarra Health and Medical Research Institute (IHMRI) is a joint initiative of the University of Wollongong and Illawarra Shoalhaven Local Health District. IHMRI’s goal is to foster, support and grow health and medical research in the Illawarra by connecting and supporting academic and clinician researchers around research problems of relevance to the region and the world. IHMRI provides research leadership, coordination, infrastructure and facilities to more than 500 academic and clinical researchers throughout the region.