

## Dairy Group Sheds Weight-Loss Ads

**M**ILK MAY DO a body good, but not necessarily by helping you lose weight. Under pressure from the Federal Trade Commission (FTC) and an activist group, the National Dairy Council will drop its ads touting dairy products as an aid to weight loss. The \$200 million-plus ad campaign, with slogans such as “Milk your diet. Lose weight!,” promoted consuming three servings daily of dairy to help keep the pounds off. The Dairy Council cited an eight-page bibliography of research backing those claims, but the key clinical trials behind the campaign were both conducted by Michael B. Zemel, MD, of the University of Tennessee. Dr. Zemel then took the unusual step of patenting his findings, so the Dairy Council compensated him whenever its ads relied on his work, as well as giving him grants to conduct his research.

The Physicians Committee for Responsible Medicine (PCRM), an advocacy group that promotes a diet free of animal products, petitioned the FTC in 2005 to halt the dairy ads. PCRM argued that the scientific evidence was insufficient to support a weight-loss claim for dairy products, saying, “Only one researcher—who has a financial stake in the outcome—showed a statistically significant effect of dairy product consumption on weight loss and only when paired with a strict caloric restriction.” (See the September 2005 *Healthletter*.)

In a letter to PCRM, the FTC wrote that the Dairy Council had agreed to change the ads “until further research provides stronger, more conclusive evidence of an association between dairy consumption and weight loss.”

## Taking Herbs on Faith

**S**CIENCE? *We don't need no stinkin' science!* That seems to be the attitude of most herbal-supplement users, according to a University of Iowa study. Based on the 2002 National Health Interview Survey of 30,617 adults, researchers concluded that roughly two-

thirds of adults using commonly consumed herbs do so without paying attention to scientific evidence—however tenuous—that the herbs work. The lone exception was echinacea. Otherwise, people apparently just take herbs on general principle and faith that the supplements must be good for them, somehow. Women and the college-educated were more likely to use herbs based on scientific evidence. Younger adults, under age 60, and black adults were significantly less likely to use herbs based on evidence of specific benefits.

**TO LEARN MORE:** *Mayo Clinic Proceedings*, May 2007; abstract at <[www.mayoclinicproceedings.com/Abstract.asp?AID=4359](http://www.mayoclinicproceedings.com/Abstract.asp?AID=4359)>.

## Benefits Brighten Dark-Chocolate Sales

**T**HE MUCH-publicized health benefits of dark chocolate have had a sweet effect on the candy's sales, which soared 49% from 2003 to 2006. According to a report by market research firm Mintel International, dark-chocolate sales reached a record \$1.88 billion last year. But speakers at a recent symposium organized by the Chocolate Manufacturers Association warned against pitching dark chocolate as a “health food.” Douglas Healy, project director of the HealthFocus International consulting firm, cautioned that consumers will react negatively if companies stop positioning dark chocolate as an indulgence—albeit one with healthful antioxidants. Jeffrey B. Blumberg, director of the Antioxidants Research Laboratory at

Tufts' Jean Mayer USDA Human Nutrition Research Center on Aging, told the panel, “If you consume about an ounce of dark chocolate a day, you will see some cardiovascular benefits.” But he reminded marketers that chocolate is also “high in fat and calories.”

Blumberg added, “The flavonoids in dark chocolate have been shown to have some benefit on risk factors for cardiovascular disease and diabetes in short-term human studies. While the high fat and calorie content of chocolate means consumption must be limited, these studies suggest promise for the development of new, low-calorie cocoa foods and beverages.”

## Global Report Finds Hypertension High

The numbers are almost enough to raise your blood pressure: Almost 1 billion people worldwide suffer from hypertension, according to the first-ever global analysis of the impact and incidence of high blood pressure. The report, released in a briefing in Washington, DC, predicts that an additional 500 million people will join the ranks of the hypertensive by 2025. High blood pressure, it finds, is a problem not just in North America and Western Europe, but throughout the developing world—affecting one-third of adults, for example, in Mexico, Paraguay and Venezuela, a rate comparable to the US. It's even worse in Western Europe, where 45% of Spanish adults and 55% of Germans have hypertension.

Road) and a new Latin American Diet Pyramid. The pamphlet promotes fresh produce and whole grains instead of processed foods, emphasizing the benefits of traditional ingredients such as maize, quinoa, plantains, mangos and papayas. “Camino Magico” offers shopping lists and meal ideas with healthier versions of Mexican favorites. Obesity rates are higher among Hispanics than non-Hispanics, and Latinos are twice as likely to suffer from diabetes, the coalition points out.

**TO LEARN MORE:** Latino Nutrition Coalition <[www.latinonutrition.org](http://www.latinonutrition.org)>. ♦

## “Magic Road” to Better Nutrition

**A** NEW nutrition campaign aimed at Latinos urges them to eat more the way *mamá* used to cook, instead of wolfing down cheese-slathered fast food at taco joints. The effort, launched by the nonprofit Latino Nutrition Coalition, features a 16-page pamphlet titled “*Camino Magico*” (Magic

**Did you know...** US sales of organic foods totaled nearly \$17 billion in 2006, a 22% increase over 2005, and now represent nearly 3% of all food and beverage sales.