

Study finds dairy may help improve blood sugar control better than vegan diet

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A new clinical study published in the journal *Clinical Nutrition* suggests that incorporating dairy products into a plant-based diet may be more effective in managing blood sugar levels than following a strictly vegan diet.

Conducted by researchers from the University of Reading and the Madras Diabetes Research Foundation, the 14-day dietary intervention trial involved 30 healthy adults. Participants were divided into two groups: one followed a lacto-vegetarian diet (plant-based with dairy), while the other adhered to a vegan diet (strictly plant-based with no dairy). Both diets were matched for calories, protein, and carbohydrates.

The findings revealed that individuals on the lacto-vegetarian diet experienced significantly lower average blood sugar levels compared to those on the vegan diet. Importantly, these differences remained even after adjusting for age, sex, body mass index, and baseline glucose levels.

“People on the vegan diet had elevated levels of phenylalanine after meals. Excess of this substance may impair the body’s ability to manage sugar effectively,” explained Professor Vimal Karani, lead author of the study from the University of Reading. “In contrast, the dairy group showed higher levels of beneficial compounds like acetyl carnitine, which may help cells utilise fat for energy and protect against blood sugar spikes.”

To monitor the effects in real time, participants wore continuous glucose monitors that tracked blood sugar levels every 15 minutes for two weeks, allowing researchers to capture fluctuations that standard tests would miss.

The study’s implications are particularly relevant for India, which is home to 101 million people living with type 2 diabetes and 136 million with prediabetes—the second-highest diabetes burden globally. With dietary interventions playing a critical role in diabetes prevention and management, the findings could influence public health guidance and personal dietary choices.

Dairy products consumed in the study included about 558 grams daily, primarily in the form of milk, yoghurt, and cheese. Plant-based alternatives used in the vegan diet include soy milk and tofu.

The researchers caution that while the study provides promising insights, further long-term studies in larger populations are needed to better understand the role of specific nutrients and food combinations in diabetes prevention.

Nonetheless, the study adds to growing evidence that moderate dairy intake may support better metabolic outcomes, particularly in populations vulnerable to diabetes.