

Reuters and PCRM Bad for Bone Health

By ACSH Staff — March 10, 2005

A March 8 Reuters article entitled "Milk Alone Not Best for Bones" reported on a study that concluded that milk and other dairy products do not promote bone health in children over age seven. What Reuters neglected to note was the fact that the study's sponsoring organization, the Physicians Committee for Responsible Medicine (PCRM), has a blatant anti-dairy agenda. That doesn't mean their study shouldn't be evaluated on its merits, but such potential conflicts of interest would probably be quickly noted in the case of, say, a study that came to "pro-industry" conclusions.

This study's conclusion, as reported by Reuters, is that parents should look toward exercise and certain fruits and vegetables to increase calcium uptake in their children. The study's results indicate that children over age seven do not receive bone benefit from dairy consumption (though the study says nothing about how beneficial the suggested replacements would be). PCRM's website, PCRM.org [1], highlights the study as its main feature, including the headline "For strong bones, kids need exercise, sunshine, and a dairy-free diet," even though the study does not conclude that a dairy-free diet is best. PCRM is clearly pushing its agenda with this study, and the public needs to know that.

Reuters frequently notes any agenda or potential conflict of interest when it reports on the conclusions of researchers or organizations. For example, upon looking at the top health articles on Reuters.com [2], I noticed that the very first article included such notes. The article reported on a study promoting the use of the drug Plavix for second heart attack prevention and quoted the study's author as Dr. Marc Sabatine, lead researcher "of the study sponsored by the two drug makers." Presumably, Reuters and other news sources include these references so that readers may feel fully informed and make their own choices about how to view the conclusions and how to act on them. Not to include this valuable information in the reporting on PCRM's conclusions is irresponsible.

We fully agree that consumers should be aware of the calcium in certain non-dairy foods and beverages, and we definitely support the diversification of diet to obtain nutrients from a variety of sources. But we worry that this type of reporting, without the important notation of the group's agenda, might cause some parents to stop giving their kids foods like milk and yogurt, which have long been known to promote bone health, especially in children.

Lynnea Mills is a research intern at the American Council on Science and Health.

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Links

[1] <http://pcrm.org>

[2] <http://reuters.com>