

Health Panel Calls Attack On Milk From rBST-Treated Cows an Unwarranted Distortion of Science

By ACSH Staff — March 1, 1998

New York, NY March, 1998. A self-styled consumer group is distorting scientific research to scare the public about a perfectly safe product milk from cows treated with genetically engineered bovine somatotropin, or rBST the American Council on Science and Health announced today.

ACSH, a consortium of more than 250 scientists, was responding to unfounded charges by Dr. Samuel Epstein of the Cancer Prevention Coalition that milk from such cows will lead to elevated levels of a hormone called IGF-1 which in turn will cause increased risk of prostate cancer.

Epstein based his charges on one small preliminary study that indicated that high levels of this hormone in the blood are associated with increased risk of prostate cancer in humans. While this finding is important and certainly bears further investigation, it is by no means proven that high IGF-1 causes prostate cancer it may simply be an indicator that a precancerous condition exists.

The putative connection between milk from BST-treated cows and prostate cancer is that when BST is injected into cows, they make more IGF-1, some of which appears in their milk. But cows (and humans) normally make IGF-1, and if lactating will secrete it into their milk.

The real questions are: 1. whether or not this IGF-1 substantially increases the concentration of the hormone in milk and 2. whether or not the hormone would be absorbed in sufficient amounts to raise blood levels in humans.

And the answer, in each case is 'No'. Research has shown that the concentration of IGF-1 in milk from rBST-treated cows is not elevated over that in untreated cows. Furthermore, even if all the IGF-1 present in milk were absorbed into a person's blood, there is so much naturally there that the additional hormone would hardly be detectable.

Said Dr. Ruth Kava, Director of Nutrition at ACSH, "It's a shame that good science can be so twisted and misinterpreted and then used to inflame the fears of consumers. Milk from rBST-treated cows is equivalent to that from untreated cows in terms of both nutritional quality and safety consumers should not be afraid to enjoy its benefits."

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