Executive Summary
Except in cases of milk allergy (an uncommon problem), cows’ milk and its products are acceptable, nutritious foods for persons one year of age and older. Milk and dairy products are good sources of high-quality protein and several vitamins, and they are the best food source of the mineral calcium, a nutrient often not plentiful enough in the American diet. It is difficult to obtain an adequate supply of calcium from non-dairy sources, and it requires heavy reliance on foods not favored by most Americans.

It is not necessary to eliminate dairy products from the diet to reduce dietary fat intake or to solve the problem of lactose intolerance. Individuals who want to limit their fat intake can choose low-fat or fat-free dairy products. Those who need to limit their lactose intake should select hard cheeses (which are naturally low in lactose), yogurt (which is usually well tolerated), or lactose-reduced milk. Consuming small quantities of milk may help to increase tolerance of lactose.

Some preliminary reports have suggested a possible link between early exposure to cows’ milk proteins and risk of Type 1 diabetes mellitus in individuals with a genetic predisposition to the disease. Further research has yielded conflicting results, but recommendations from the American Academy of Pediatrics recognize the possibility and encourage breast-feeding and the avoidance of unmodified cows’ milk during the first year of life.

The fortification of milk with vitamin D has played an important role in the near-elimination of the dietary deficiency disease rickets in the U.S. Adequate intake of vitamin D is necessary for the proper absorption of calcium and the prevention of osteoporosis. Valid concerns have been raised in the past about several reports that milk sold in a specific locality in the U.S. contained excessive amounts of this vitamin due to careless dosing; however, improved monitoring measures are now in place.

Cows’ milk and its products are healthful, exceptionally nutritious foods that play an important role in the American diet. They should not be eliminated from government guidelines or programs.

Unmodified cows’ milk is not recommended for infants under the age of one year. Breast-feeding is the preferred method of infant feeding, and iron-fortified infant formula is the only acceptable alternative.