

Brooke Miles, a former-dairy-fanatic-turned-vegan, is a humorous writer and a sought-after, award-winning speaker. This is her TEDx Talk titled "**The Magnificent Milk Myth... Debunked**" at TEDxWilmington. Following is the full text of the talk.

TRANSCRIPT:

What if you discovered that something you've been taught since childhood was completely wrong? What if more than 5 billion people on earth could prove it?

Humankind has been a huge fan of milk and all things dairy for thousands of years. Of course, the caveman wasn't milking cows, but when animal domestication came about, so did dairy.

We're all taught the wonders of milk. Want strong bones? Drink milk. Want a great source of protein? Drink milk. Want something for dunking your Oreo cookies in - milk and cookies? Drink milk.

Besides, how can you dispel the advice from people like Martha Stewart, Heidi Klum, Taylor Swift, Wolverine, Austin Powers, Bart and Lisa Simpson, and hundreds of other real and fake celebrities who all wore milk mustaches?

Until about three years ago, I wore a nice, thick milk mustache too. As an on-again, off-again vegetarian since the age of 14, I relied heavily on dairy for my protein and, of course, calcium.

But for me, dairy was more than just nutrition, it was a full sensory experience. The creamy-mouth feel of whole milk on a bowl of crunchy raisin bran, the stretch of greasy mozzarella on New York-style pizza, and

the occasional decadence of a full pint of chocolate Häagen-Dazs after a long day at work - occasional!

But on December 31, 2012, I vowed I would never eat dairy again. And, on that fateful day, I scarfed down with tears my last pint of chocolate Häagen-Dazs.

Why would I torture myself?

Well, a few months before that, a couple of vegans came into my life. Let's call them Jennifer and Anna - because those are their names.

Now, vegans, just so we're sure, don't need anything that comes from animals. No meat, no dairy, no eggs, nothing. Naturally, I thought Jennifer and Anna were cuckoo for cocoa puffs, but I grilled them with questions.

And you know what? They convinced me I had to become vegan.

Now, to be completely transparent here, it wasn't because of anything they said, but I just looked at them, and they were hot. And I say that platonically: I'm married but - I had just turned 40, and I wanted to be hot too.

Within three months of becoming vegan, I lost 15 pounds and required two fewer hours of sleep every night - that is without any physical exercise or other changes to my lifestyle.

The biggest change I made was wiping away my milk mustache.

Now, today I'm not here to push my vegan agenda on you *-(whispering)* - a little bit - but I am passionate about making sure you're an advocate for your own health.

Let's dispel some big myths about milk and look at the science behind it.

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First, there's calcium. We need calcium to survive. We need it for our bones, our muscles, our nerves, and thank goodness for cows, because for the longest time I thought calcium came from cows.

As a matter of fact, it should just be called "cowcium." Okay, I was wrong. Calcium, it's an element on the periodic table, it turns out, and it's formed during supernova explosions in space. It's also the fifth most abundant element on the earth's crust.

Okay, so how do cows get calcium?

The calcium is in the soil, it goes up into the plant, the cow gets hungry, it eats the plant, the calcium goes to the bloodstream, through the mammary glands and squirts out as milk.

Okay, assume these are udders - it's the closest I have. Sorry. Okay?

So, okay, in that case, so - the cow is actually the middleman, right? Why not just eat the plants? - Kind of makes sense. As a matter of fact, there are plenty of plant sources that are more calcium dense than milk.

For example, fresh and dried herbs like basil, parsley and thyme, sesame seeds, flax seeds, chia seeds, almonds, tahini, tofu, garlic -yum! - Brazil nuts, blackstrap molasses, and also lots of dark leafy green vegetables.

Now, you have to look at more than just calcium levels: there's also calcium absorption. And this is where the scientific findings totally depend on people's agendas.

If you ask pretty much any vegan, and plenty of non-vegan nutritionists, they will say that calcium has much higher absorption rates when it comes through most plant sources. Dairy producers and others will say the opposite.

Whom do you believe? One thing is for sure. The countries with the highest rates of dairy consumption overall have the highest rates of osteoporosis, the highest. They include Finland, Sweden, England, and - woohoo! - the USA. Aren't we proud!

The countries with the lowest rates of dairy consumption overall have the lowest rates of osteoporosis. Take China, for example. There are 1 billion people living there who are eating a virtually dairy-free diet, and you don't see them walking away home every day and breaking bones. They seem to do okay, and they don't have nearly the rates of osteoporosis that we have here in the United States.

To be fair, there are other factors that contribute to osteoporosis, such as your vitamin intake levels as well as physical activity. But let's look at the worldwide trends.

Moving beyond calcium. Did you know that humans are the only species to drink the breast milk of another species? It's creepy, I think. Mammals produce milk for their particular offspring, for their species.

For example, human breast milk is designed for a human baby to grow slowly physically compared to other animals but have rapid brain development.

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Cow's milk, on the other hand, is designed to take a cute little baby calf

and beef it up to nearly 1,000 lbs in its first year of life. It's no wonder when I stopped drinking milk, I dropped two dress sizes.

Now, another distinction that humans have: we're the only species to drink milk after the weaning age. Milk is meant for babies. Most humans after the age of 5 lose the ability to digest lactose, which is the sugar found in all animal milks.

When I say most humans, I mean three-quarters of the world's population, or five billion people, primarily in Asia, Africa and South America.

Now, if you're wondering, it happens I'm in that one-quarter of the world's population.

How did that happen?

Archaeologists chalk it up to a genetic mutation that occurred thousands of years ago in dairying communities. So, if you can drink milk without a problem, you can proudly call yourself a genetic mutant. Yes!

Now add in other things like antibiotic residues, recombinant bovine growth hormones, toxic residues, and that whole milk and cookie disease we heard about earlier today, and you have to wonder: Why is it that the USDA recommends three servings of dairy for adult men and women as part of a nutritious, healthy diet?

You have to remember that the USDA stands for United States Department of Agriculture, and it has more than one mission. One is certainly to provide nutritional guidelines, but another one is to support agribusiness, and they're completely public about this.

As a matter of fact, the USDA has an agricultural marketing service and they have a dairy program as part of that. The whole point of the dairy

program - and it's on their website - it's to basically help U.S. dairy producers efficiently market their products and make sure that U.S. consumers have access to a sufficient supply of these products at all times. That's practically verbatim.

So, obviously, you can't be an advocate for consumers and the people trying to sell to consumers at the same time.

Now, today we're not going to be able to dismantle the USDA or transform an entire nation's mindset about milk, but we can make a difference one glass at a time.

So, the next time you're about to pour a nice tall glass of milk for yourself, or for your children, ask yourself: Does milk really do the body good?

I challenge you to pour that milk down the drain, get in your car, go to the supermarket and get some almond milk or soy milk. They make for nice milk mustaches too.

Thank you.

Recommended Book/Course for Further Reading:

[Vegan for Life: Everything You Need to Know to Be Healthy and Fit on a Plant-Based Diet](#)

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