Place of dairy products in a holistic vision of the diet
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Dairy are part of diets and dietary guidelines worldwide. They are subjects of intensive research, notably for their associations with chronic diseases and risk factors for them. However, a holistic picture of their health potential within complex diets has never been systematically reviewed. Our objectives were: 1) to update associations between dairy (total, milk, yogurt and cheese) and main chronic diseases and risk factors; 2) to review associations between dairy-containing dietary patterns and main chronic diseases and risk factors.

International expertise for the associations “dairy vs chronic diseases” and complementary subsequent literature up to July 2015 were collected. The associations were qualified as protective (decreased risk), neutral (no association) or deleterious (increased risk). Then, association’s strength was graded as high, moderate and weak.

Concerning chronic disease prevalence, total dairy products, milks, yogurts and cheese are either protective or neutral, except for prostate cancer and Parkinson’s disease for which they might increase risks. Concerning risk factors, total dairy products, milks, yogurts and cheese are either protective or neutral with no increased risks. Health potential of dairy products, when included within complex diets such as Mediterranean, vegetarian, healthy/prudent, Western and DASH diets, will be also presented.

With a holistic perspective considering all together main chronic diseases, risk factors and complex diets, dairy products appear as important contributors of a healthy diet. However, further studies are needed for clarifying the associations between dairy and prostate cancer and Parkinson’s disease. Furthermore, the matrix effect appears to play an important role in dairy health potential.

Key words: Dairy products, chronic diseases, risk factors, complex diets, holistic perspective