



## Short communication: Dairy consumption among middle-aged and elderly adults in Switzerland

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### ABSTRACT

Different studies have shown that people are aware of the benefits of dairy products, but a sizeable part of the world's population still does not consume the recommended amount of dairy produce. The aims of the present research were to determine which dairy products are consumed by the middle-aged and elderly (50–81 yr old) living in Switzerland and to explore why some of this population segment are actually reducing their consumption of dairy products. On average, older Swiss adults consumed 2.6 portions of dairy products per day, which is slightly less than the recommended 3 to 4 portions a day. Additionally, about one-quarter of the respondents indicated that they have reduced their milk or dairy consumption. The main reasons given for this decision were to reduce fat or cholesterol. A reported difficulty in digesting some dairy products may be a further reason for limiting dairy intake, particularly cheese. It follows that a need for the propagation of appropriate nutritional information about dairy products to the middle-aged and elderly exists.

**Key words:** elderly, middle-aged, dairy, consumption, Swiss

### Short Communication

In Europe, the proportion of elderly people is increasing. By 2050, more than one-quarter (27%) of the population is expected to be aged 65 yr or older. Better knowledge of health and nutritional status, as well as of appropriate nutritional behavior, might help to improve quality of life in the third and fourth ages of lifespan (Turconi et al., 2013).

Evidence exists that the public is aware of the importance of milk and its products, especially for the positive effects of its calcium content on bone metabolism (Wham, 2001; Bus and Worsley, 2003; Wham and Worsley, 2003; Davis and Katz, 2013). However,

research has also shown that a significant proportion of the population still does not consume the recommended amount of dairy produce (Wham, 2001; Federal Department of Health, 2012; Stewart et al., 2013; Turconi et al., 2013). It is therefore important to identify which dairy products are consumed by the elderly, and to understand the motives underlying nonconsumption or reduced consumption.

### Participants and Study Design

For the present study, the LINK Institute (Lucerne, Switzerland) selected a total of 726 Swiss residents, by means of a telephone recruiting interview, according to age and region (German speaking = 50.3%, French speaking = 30.4%, and Italian speaking = 19.3%). For statistical reasons, the proportion of Italian-speaking participants was over-represented. The data were collected by printed questionnaire, or by electronic online questionnaire (30%), between September and November 2012. The target group was consumers between 50 and 81 yr old who were not living in a nursing home.

### Questionnaire

The questionnaire comprised 4 sections. The first of these dealt with general questions about food and health [D. Gille, U. Bütikofer, M. Chollet, A. Schmid, T. Altintzoglou, P. Honkanen (Nofima, Tromsø, Norway), H. Stoffers, B. Walther, and P. Piccinali; unpublished data]. The second section, focused on dairy products, is the subject matter of the current paper. The third part concerned meat products [A. Schmid, D. Gille, P. Piccinali, U. Bütikofer, M. Chollet, T. Altintzoglou, P. Honkanen (Nofima, Tromsø, Norway), B. Walther, H. and Stoffers; unpublished data], and the final part sought personal data including sociodemographics. The questionnaire was made available in French, German, and Italian.

In the second part of the questionnaire, discussed herein, respondents were asked about their habitual dairy intake and their reasons for consuming these

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products. The first question established whether the respondent consumes milk or dairy products. If not, they were requested to proceed directly to the section dealing with meat products.

Respondents' intake of 11 different dairy products was measured on a 7-point frequency scale, as indicated in Figure 1. Where the participant consumed reduced-fat dairy products, he or she had to specify the reason by choosing between "calories reduction," "reduction of fat intake," "better taste," "better texture," or "on recommendation from another person." In the next 3 questions, the consumer had to rate milk, yogurt, and cheese on 5-point Likert scales as healthy, safe, tasty, and easy to digest.

Respondents were asked whether they were reducing their consumption of (a) milk and (b) dairy products and, if so, to indicate their motives for doing so. Responses were recorded on 5-point Likert scale ratings

of the following possible reasons: "because of changes in lifestyle (e.g., children left home)"; "do not tolerate it any more"; "do not like the taste any more"; "want to lose weight"; "want to reduce fat intake"; and "want to reduce cholesterol intake." Two additional responses were offered for dairy products: "to reduce salt intake" and "to reduce sugar intake." Explanatory variables included sociodemographics such as sex (categorical), age (continuous), education level (categorical), height, and weight (continuous).

### Data Analysis

Questionnaires were analyzed using Systat13.0 (Systat Software Inc., Richmond, CA). Body mass index (**BMI**) was calculated as the ratio between weight (kg) and height squared (m<sup>2</sup>). To facilitate the statistical calculations, consumption frequency of dairy-based

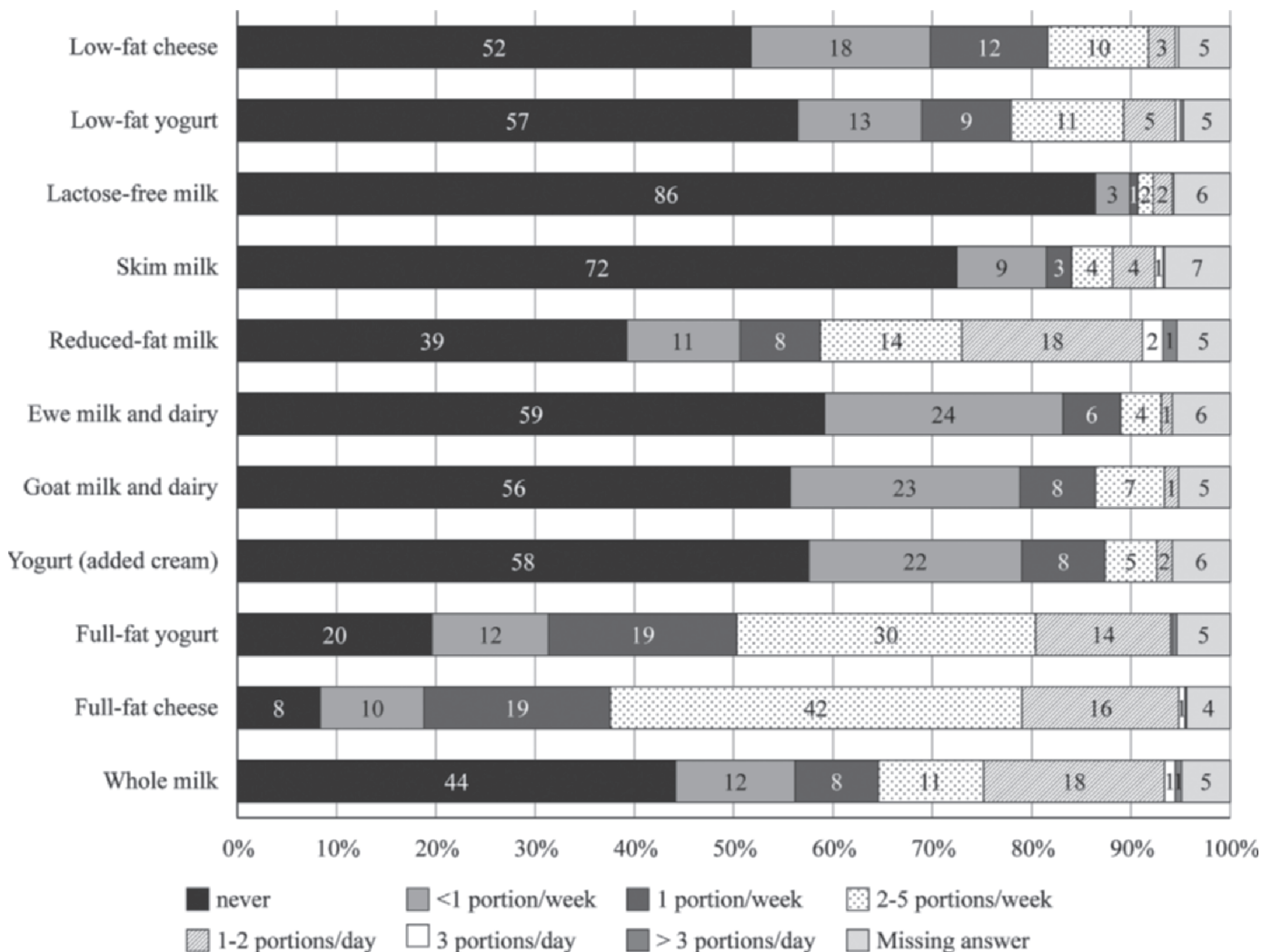


Figure 1. Consumption of dairy products by older adults living in Switzerland. (No values in the graph for data <1%).

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