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The Picky Eater Part II – Too Much Milk

First, I would like to dedicate this article to a very unique cause. As I exited our shul late this evening, my Chavrusa Yishay Honig noticed a truck standing close by. Being that we just past Hurricane Irene, we assumed that these were utility workers working around the clock to repair downed wires. However, as we neared the truck, we recognized the special people in it – Rabbi Zomick and Rabbi Picker from Yeshiva Gedolah of Five Towns. They were driving around town at this late hour to fix the damaged Eiruv. As we thanked them for their dedicated work on behalf of our community, it occurred to us that they literally put their life on the line, climbing high in the darkness of the night in order to facilitate our lives. Therefore, I would like to salute the people serving on the Eiruv committee and the Yeshiva Gedolah of Five Towns.

In last week's article, I wrote some suggestions about picky eaters. The main thrust of this week's article is – how much milk is enough for toddlers?

After thousands of discussions during physicals at my office, I noticed a clear trend. When a mother appears distraught and in total desperation when she is asked about her toddler's nutrition, I pause, and ask one final question: How much milk does your child drink? It appears that the more milk a toddler drinks, the poorer his appetite is, and the more frustrated the mom becomes.

I am sure that those of you who raised a few kids have noticed this pattern already. It is usually the first time parents that have the somewhat naïve notion of: "milk – it does the body good". I wonder if the media should be blamed for this. After all, we all grew up hearing the slogan – got milk? With those preconceived notions in the minds of us parents, as an infant transitions into his toddlerhood and becomes a picky eater, we may reflexively decide to give him a bottle of milk instead of the dinner he just spilled all over the kitchen floor. After all, we all know that milk has a great nutritional value – it contains fats, proteins and carbohydrates, and is even fortified with Vitamin D (which most of us in the Northeast appear to be deficit in) and Calcium.

Too much milk intake however, turns out to be a major cause of anemia, failure to thrive (extremely poor growth), chronic fatigue, constipation and chronic nausea. Many studies have already established the Triad of excessive milk intake, causing anemia and subsequently – developmental delay. It appears that excessive milk intake can suppress the appetite of a child for Iron rich foods. Furthermore, milk binds Iron in our guts and hinders its absorption into our body. Even when you are finally successful in feeding your child a chicken leg, the milk in his stomach from an earlier snack will *lower* the absorption of the much needed Iron.

So here is my suggestion for you child's milk and dairy intake:



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1. If your child *hates* milk – don't panic!!! Even though milk is enriched with calcium, many other foods such as green leafy vegetables or grains contain calcium as well. Additionally, if your child will agree to eat an 8 oz serving of yogurt and a 2 oz slice of cheese per day, they would get 800 mg of calcium which is the recommended daily intake for kids 4-8 years old.
2. If your child *loves* milk – limit the intake to 16 oz per day. Try to stay strong for 2 weeks and please let me know if you noticed a huge turnaround in your child's appetite.
3. Try and wean off your toddler from drinking a bottle of milk *in bed*. Some of the most horrific dental decay I have seen at my office was from drinking milk in bed at night. This is why I make sure that I ask at least 2 questions about milk intake at every toddler's physical exam at my office: how much and *when* a child receives the milk. If your child insists on drinking milk in bed, try and give an extra large cup of milk an *hour prior* to bedtime and leave out the bedtime bottle.
4. Keep in mind that dairy products are made out of.....milk. It turns out that grandmothers across ethnicities share a common gene – “the spoiling gene”. I *strongly* discourage any sane parent from taking this article and trying to change this compassionate character that our own parents have. I do want to remind you that we parents, lack this benevolent “spoiling gene”. Please try and refrain from initiating family feuds while your children are enjoying their warm and loving grandparents. Letting your children enjoy those cherished moments and to have fond memories of their Bubby and Zaidy is *much* more important than the negative effects of some extra milk. To put it into perspective, it would take at least a few weeks of *exclusive* milk intake to cause anemia in your child. But at your *own* house, set the rules straight. Don't replace meals with sweetened or even plain yogurt and cheese. Eating an exclusive *dairy* diet will have the same horrible outcome as excessive milk consumption.

For those of you who would like to know *exactly* how much calcium and vitamin D your child needs per day, I found a very useful website from the NIH that has clear and concise charts for each age category. Please visit <http://ods.od.nih.gov/factsheets/Calcium> and <http://ods.od.nih.gov/factsheets/VitaminD> for that information.

Wishing you and yours strong bones and clear minds,

Sincerely,

David Elazar Simai M.D.



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P.S. if you would like to support the 5 Towns Eiruv and join me in showing appreciation for their devoted work, please visit <http://fivetownseruv.org>