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Athletes raise a glass to the power of milk

A host of top athletes have hailed the recovery powers of milk on the back of two new pieces of groundbreaking research.

Olympic sprinter Marlon Devonish, champion decathlete Dean Macey and long jumper Greg Rutherford were all quick to celebrate the news that milk may promote better recovery after exercise than both water and isotonic sports drinks.

The key new study, conducted by Loughborough University and published in the British Journal of Nutrition, indicated that milk is significantly more effective than water or isotonic drinks at rehydration after training. And it's more good news for dairy as a second study, which was published in the American Journal of Clinical Nutrition this month, also backed milk as a post-exercise drink.

This study suggested that milk can help increase muscle size and strength, whilst reducing body fat. Several other studies have also noted milk's positive effects on exercise and recovery, while athletes and sports teams are already experiencing the benefits by consuming milk after training.

Dean Macey said: "I can't say it comes as a huge surprise to me that this research says milk is the best thing for athletes, it makes perfect sense. If you want a great, natural drink to help performance then it's got to contain milk every time."

Olympic gold medallist Marlon Devonish added: "I use milk on my cereal everyday. After hearing that it aids recovery, I will certainly incorporate it as part of my training and recovery for the future."

Long jumper Greg Rutherford said: "I have drunk milk for a long time and have found that it helps me recover after hard training sessions. It aids my recovery and replenishes lost nutrients.

"Now that I know that it is proven to have these effects, I will be drinking a lot more of it. There are many isotonic drinks out there and it can be very difficult to choose the best one because they all claim to have huge benefits. Milk is the most natural and easy to get hold of."

The research, which was funded by the Milk Development Council, tested the effectiveness of skimmed milk versus water and isotonic sports drinks to rehydrate the body after exercise.

Loughborough University researcher Dr Susan M Shirreffs, who is based at the School of Sport & Exercise Sciences and conducted the research, said: "The results of the study are really exciting as they show that skimmed milk produces a significant improvement in re-hydration compared to the other drinks evaluated in the study. As dehydration can have an impact on performance, it's essential to re-hydrate in preparation for subsequent exercise in order to help maximise one's abilities."

Dr Judith Bryans, Director of The Dairy Council, said: "This study joins the growing volume of literature which suggests that skimmed milk is a natural and effective post exercise recovery aid. Drinking milk is not only a valuable way to re-hydrate the body but also provides an excellent source of energy, protein and a vast array of different vitamins and minerals essential to the good health of hardworking sportspeople and the population as a whole."

Many sportspeople suffer some dehydration throughout tournament type exercise as more fluids can be lost, mostly through perspiration, than can easily be replaced between consecutive exercise sessions. Even mild dehydration can compromise performance and have major repercussions during competition.

For further information relating to dairy research or for nutrition advice relating to dairy, please visit www.milk.co.uk, or contact The Dairy Council at info@dairycouncil.org.uk or on 0207 395 4030.

Visit www.milkrecoveryzone.com for more information and to download the full research report.

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NOTES TO EDITORS

The addition of electrolytes, in particular sodium, to post exercise re-hydration drinks has been demonstrated to enhance the re-hydration process; however, the researchers suggested that the natural presence of sodium, along with a relatively large quantity of potassium in milk accounted for its particular effectiveness in restoring fluid balance.

In this study healthy young volunteers were recruited and asked to complete a series of 10 minute sessions on an exercise bicycle in a warm room, after which they were given one of the four types of liquids being studied. Each volunteer then repeated the experiment on three additional occasions and was given a different drink each time. The amount of water lost during and after each exercise was measured.

MILK DEVELOPMENT COUNCIL

The Milk Development Council (MDC) is a public body which was set up in 1994 (after the disbanding of the milk boards) to pick up essential services for dairy farmers that would not otherwise be provided. These services include the genetic evaluation of dairy breeding stock, research and development into better ways of producing milk, and the stimulation and development of the market for milk.

The MDC is funded by a statutory levy on all milk sold off-farm, at the rate of 0.06p per litre. This provides an annual income of around £7m.

The MDC's current focus is on improving the profitability of dairy farming by focusing on three specific areas:

- Innovation and consumer education to stimulate demand and create more value in the dairy 'category'
- Better supply chain relationships that ensure farmers as well as processors and retailers can enjoy a sustainable share of the profits
- Competitive milk production to help farmers realise better margins in the short term and increase their ability to compete in European markets in the long term.

The MDC co-funds the industry's nutritional and issues management resource – The Dairy Council – with the processors' trade body Dairy UK.

THE DAIRY COUNCIL

The Dairy Council is a non-profit making organization, which is jointly funded by farmers and processors via the Milk Development Council and Dairy UK. The Dairy Council provides science-based nutrition information on the role of dairy foods in a healthy balanced diet and lifestyle.