

## GLOBAL YOGURT SUMMIT PROBES HEALTH BENEFITS OF DAIRY CONSUMPTION



Few motorists would intentionally put contaminated, poor-quality fuel in their cars. They know that would not only immediately affect performance, but could ultimately damage the engine. Yet few take the same care in selecting the fuel their body requires, consuming foods that do little to provide good nutrition, according to **Olga Kukhar**, health affairs manager at Danone Ukraine.

“People own a car for a few years,” Kukhar says. “Our bodies last a lifetime. How many years a life contains can be heavily influenced by lifestyle and nutrition – the body’s fuel.” Kukhar recently returned from the first Global

Summit on the Health Effects of Yogurt, held at the 2013 Experimental Biology meeting in Boston, Massachusetts. The summit, which brought together nutritionists and researchers from around the world to discuss the latest findings on yogurt and nutrition, was sponsored by nutrition associations in the United States and Britain, as well as the Danone Institute.

Nutrition represents the fuel our bodies need, Kukhar says, and shouldn’t be confused with calories, which have come to be associated with energy. “People have been taught to think in terms of their caloric intake, but not about where the calories come from. All food contains calories, but not all food provides the vitamins and minerals we need to thrive – that’s nutrition.”

We need to think less about calories and more about nutritional value, Kukhar explains, adding that nutritional value is the new index for helping to understand the health value of food. “Nutritional value is an indicator of the body’s fuel quality. Yogurt is a product with high nutrition value, providing calcium, phosphorus, protein, and vitamins that bring better health.”

Kukhar says that dairy consumption has been linked to a decrease in disease, and that consuming three dairy products (yogurt, milk and cheese) a day brings a healthier life.

Dr. Sharon M. Donovan, a professor of nutrition at the University of Illinois at Urbana, helped redefine the concept of ‘nutritious’ foods at the summit, noting that ‘nutrition density’ may be a better measure of

the concept of nutritious food than simply counting calories or avoiding ingredients like fat or sodium, which most consumers recognize as unhealthy.

“The nutrient density approach distinguishes foods with high levels of nutrients compared to low levels of nutrients relative to their calorie content,” Kukhar said.

Donovan also found a connection between regular yogurt consumption and a reduction in weight gain as people age, as well as lower blood pressure, but said more research is needed to discern whether yogurt or the healthy lifestyle associated with yogurt users is the cause.

In Ukraine, Kukhar points to lifestyles often associated with alcohol and tobacco use, a lack of physical energy, and poor nutrition, which comes from eating the wrong foods.

“Sadly, the result is that most Ukrainians live shorter lives than their neighbors,” she says.

The summit highlighted the health benefits of dairy products and milk, which was designed to provide complete nutrition.

“[People] who can afford to consume these products will, by definition, get very high nutrient density in their diets. The proof of that is shown in development of first-world nations, where people grow exceptionally well and can reach their full genetic potential in all aspects of their life : growth, cognitive development, and so forth,” said Professor Andrew Prentice of London.

“If people can consume a dairy product, they get a fantastic source of nutrients. The nutrient density is such that they make a great addition to the diet. And you know, that’s a very clear message. Where there are problems with decreased nutrient density in the diet because we’re eating too much junk food, dairy products clearly play a very strong role,” Professor Prentice said.

Kukhar gave the science a real-life perspective: "Just a minute of attention to the plate before eating can help you live to see your grandchildren and perhaps your great-grandchildren."