

Is This the World's Most Effortless Way to Slim Your Waistline?

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By Dr. Mercola

If you are steering away from red meat due to the negative press on saturated fats, you may be happy to hear that a very powerful fatty acid primarily found in beef and dairy products has been linked to long-term weight management and health.

This potent nutrient is called conjugated linoleic acid, or CLA, and the best possible sources of CLA are grass-fed beef and [raw dairy products](#) that come from grass-fed cattle.

Many ranchers are responding to the call from U.S. consumers by [shifting from traditional, factory-farmed, grain-fed methods](#) of raising cattle to a free-range, all-grass diet. Even the USDA is waking up to the consumer demand for grass-fed products. Their [June 2010 publication of *Livestock, Poultry, and Dairy Outlook*](#) indicates that grass-fed beef represents 3 percent of the total U.S. beef production and has been growing about 20 percent for several years.

CLA Benefits Across the Board

A host of research has been conducted on animals, under microscopes, and with humans to determine the impact of CLA on disease. Results have shown CLA to be a potent ally for combating:

- **Cancer:** Animal studies show that as little as 0.5 percent CLA in your diet could [reduce tumors by over 50 percent](#), including the following types of cancer:
 - Breast
 - Colorectal
 - Lung
 - Skin
 - Stomach
- **Cardiovascular disease**

- **High blood pressure**
- **High Cholesterol and triglycerides**
- **Osteoporosis**
- **Insulin resistance:** CLA's actions actually mimic the effect of synthetic diabetic drugs. Testing on mice with type 2 diabetes have shown CLA to improve insulin action and reduce circulating glucose. Even better, the early results from human trials are just as positive, when consuming CLA for longer than eight weeks.
- **Inflammation**
- **Immune system invaders**
- **Food-induced allergic reactions**
- **Body Composition:** [Exciting research with humans](#) has shown that CLA has been beneficial in lowering body fat, with even greater improvement in those who combine exercise with dietary intake of CLA. [Animal research has been even more promising](#), with significant improvements seen in both reducing body fat and in increasing lean body mass.
- Previous studies have shown that CLA reduces body fat while preserving muscle tissue, and may also increase your metabolic rate. [A study published in the American Journal of Clinical Nutrition](#) found that people who took 3.2 grams of CLA a day had a drop in fat mass of about 0.2 pounds a week (that's about one pound a month) compared to those given a placebo.

Since CLA cannot be manufactured in the human body, you must get it from your diet. And your best dietary source of CLA is grass-fed beef.

What's the Deal with Grass-Fed Beef?

The natural diet for ruminant animals, such as cattle, is grass. When left to feed on grass-only diets, [levels of CLA are three to five times more](#) than those fed grain-based diets. And that's just the start.

A joint effort between the USDA and Clemson University researchers in 2009 determined a total of [10 key areas where grass-fed is better than grain-fed beef](#) for human health.

In a side-by-side comparison, they determined that grass-fed beef was:

1. Lower in total fat

2. Higher in beta-carotene
3. Higher in vitamin E (alpha-tocopherol)
4. Higher in the B-vitamins thiamin and riboflavin
5. Higher in the minerals calcium, magnesium, and potassium
6. Higher in total omega-3s
7. A healthier ratio of omega-6 to omega-3 fatty acids (1.65 vs 4.84)
8. Higher in CLA (cis-9 trans-11), a potential cancer fighter
9. Higher in vaccenic acid (which can be transformed into CLA)
10. Lower in the saturated fats linked with heart disease

The Bull We've Been Fed – Dangers of Grain-Fed Cattle

If you've been reading my articles with any frequency, you'll know that [my dietary recommendations](#) are largely based on scientific literature that clearly spells out the types of foods that [human beings were naturally designed to eat](#).

This is no different for a cow.

When a ruminant is left to eat on its own, it doesn't choose corn or soy to munch on... it selects grass. Therefore, when a cow grazes on natural grass pastures, its [body composition is affected](#) accordingly: the ratio of omega-6 to omega-3 fatty acids is slightly above two. In other words, two parts omega-6 to one part omega-3, which is very close to the ideal ratio between these two fats.

Cattle raised in conventional Animal Feeding Operations (AFOs), on the other hand, are [shipped to giant feed lots and fed corn to fatten them up](#), and when consumed, this has an impact on your health as well.

When a cow's diet primarily consists of grains, its body's composition (and subsequently yours) changes. In fact, previous studies on grain-fed steer found the ratio of omega-6 to omega-3 fats was between 5-to-1 and 13-to-1, which is far from the ideal.

Since you are what you eat, the beneficial effects of eating grass-fed beef and dairy products with the proper balance of fatty acids are translated into health benefits for you. These foods are rich in all the fats now proven to be health-enhancing, and low in the fats that have been linked with disease.

Since meat from grass-fed animals is lower in fat than meat from grain-fed animals, this means that [it is lower in calories](#) as well. By switching to lean grass-fed beef, it is estimated that the average person in the U.S. could reduce intake up to 17,000 calories a year, which is equal to losing about six pounds! Imagine how this could impact the national epidemic of obesity.

The Madness of Sick Cows

Another troubling aspect of grain-fed cattle involves the well-being of the animal and, consequently, the health effect this has on you. Animal Feeding Operations (AFOs) and feedlot conditions typically result in unhealthy animals.

[A list of these consequences](#) from [Eatwild.com](#) includes:

1. **Acidosis.** During the normal digestive process, bacteria in the rumen of cattle produce a variety of acids. Saliva neutralizes the acidity from grass-based diets, but grain-based eating in feedlots prohibits saliva production. The net result is "acid indigestion."

Animals with this condition are plagued with diarrhea, go off their feed, pant, salivate excessively, kick at their bellies, and eat dirt. Over time, acidosis can lead to a condition called "rumenitis," and inflammatory response to too much acid and too little roughage and results in inefficient nutrient absorption.
2. **Liver abscesses.** From 15 to 30 percent of feedlot cattle have liver abscesses, which results when bacteria may leak out through ulcerated rumen in cattle and are ultimately transported to the liver.
3. **Bloat.** During digestion, cows produce gas and when they are on pasture, they belch up the gas without any difficulty. Grain-based feeding cause these gasses to become trapped, and results in bloat. In more serious cases of bloat, the rumen becomes so distended with gas that the animal is unable to breathe and dies from asphyxiation.
4. **Feedlot polio.** A highly acidic digestive environment results in the production of an enzyme called "thiaminase" which destroys vitamin B-1, starving the brain of energy and creating paralysis.
5. **Dust pneumonia.** In dry weather, the feedlot can become a dust bowl which springs the cattle's immune system into action and keeps it running on a constant basis, ultimately resulting in respiratory ailments and even death.

In addition, [BSE, or mad cow disease](#) results when cows are fed bone meal and waste products from other cattle infected with the disease.

Animal Feeding Operations (AFOs) Produce Inferior Food

In addition to everything already mentioned, AFO's have further health consequences.

AFO-farmed, commercially-produced animals carry a greater risk of spreading E.coli infection to humans, for example, due to the higher incidence of harmful bacteria growth in grain-fed animals, and fecal contamination in feedlots and on kill floors. This is an extremely rare problem with grass-fed, organically-raised cattle as cows that graze on grasses naturally maintain the proper ratios of healthy bacteria in their guts.

In addition, you might not suspect that AFO-farmed steak to be a source of heavy metals, pesticides, and an array of potentially harmful drugs, but that's exactly what you get.

Conventionally-raised meats contain residues of everything the animal was exposed to, which includes veterinary drugs, heavy metal residues, and pesticides from their grain-based diet.

Drugs such as growth hormones and antibiotics are given to cattle to increase growth and reduce illness, but invariably enter the food system when producers slaughter animals that still have these toxins in their system.

The use of growth hormones is becoming of particular concern as we're now clearly noticing the dramatic effects they're having both on growing youngsters and adults.

Many children are now [entering puberty at the age of 9!](#) And although this poses emotional challenges, the long-term health effects of this include an increased risk of heart disease and estrogen-sensitive cancers, for example. Leading scientists have also linked hormone-laced foods (plus other endocrine disrupting chemicals) to falling sperm counts and fertility problems in adults.

Lastly, [environmental pollution from organic waste produced by cattle](#), and the enormous amounts of petro-chemical fertilizers used to produce feed crops is out of control. Waste and waste treatment methods of grain-fed cattle are believed to be responsible for producing a significant portion of carbon dioxide, methane, and nitrous oxide (the three major gases that are largely responsible for global warming), along with other harmful gasses.

Many don't think about this, but fossil fuels are used in everything from the fertilizers and pesticides that are sprayed onto the crop, to the transportation of the feed.

Grass, on the other hand, does not require fossil fuels to grow (rotating pastures does the job instead), and other health harming practices, such as injecting the livestock with hormones and antibiotics, are also not allowed in organic farming.

The inherent differences between these two farming practices are truly vast. They are two distinctly different industries with entirely different environmental impacts, producing what is, in the end, two distinctly different animals.

Grass-fed cows equate to healthier meat -- which leads to a healthier you -- and benefits the planet.

Grass-Fed Trumps Organic Beef

There's one final note I'd like to make regarding grass-fed beef.

Oftentimes certified organic beef is misunderstood to be grass-fed; it's not necessarily so. Beef products that are considered to be "organic" come from animals being fed organic grains, especially corn, which [still results in most of the negative health problems](#) that I have highlighted earlier.

Don't be fooled!

Be sure to specifically seek out beef that is classified as grass-fed. Even if it is not labeled organic, most grass-fed cattle are fed on grasslands with limited pesticides, fertilizers, and other harmful chemicals, and will never see the inside of a feedlot.

CLA Supplements

You may be wondering whether or not you can still stay true to your beef-less diet and supplement with one of the popular CLA supplements on the market today instead. As with most of my recommendations, it is [always better to get your nutrients from whole foods](#), vs. their synthetic counterparts.

Foods that naturally contain CLA are generally far superior, easy to find, and less expensive than capsules.

That said, should you decide to go the route of taking a supplement, do make sure it does not contain any potentially harmful or detrimental additives.

You Can Taste the Difference

There is no question that the [flavor, look, smell, and texture of grass fed beef differs](#) from grain-fed beef. I have been eating it since 2001, and personally enjoy the taste and all the health-giving benefits grass-fed beef delivers.

That said, the [flavor, cooking method, and even the appearance will require a bit of an adjustment](#). Many of my patients from Europe – where grass-fed products are more prevalent – had a difficult time getting used to grain-fed beef products in the U.S. Once you make the shift, it is just a matter of time until you find the taste not only palatable but rather enjoyable.

Based on the research between grass-fed and grain-fed beef, the benefits of CLA in your diet, you owe it to yourself and to your family to make this switch.

Ref: <http://articles.mercola.com/sites/articles/archive/2011/03/23/conjugated-linoleic-acid-from-grass-fed-beef.aspx>