

# Drinking milk lowers risk of diabetes, hypertension: NUS study

**Prisca Ang**

Milk-lovers are less prone to diabetes and hypertension, but Singaporeans, like other Asians, still tend to shy away from the drink.

A study by the National University of Singapore (NUS) found that adults who drink at least one 240ml glass of cow's milk every day have a 12 per cent lower risk of diabetes than those who do not drink milk at all.

They also have a 6 per cent lower risk of hypertension, another common chronic ailment affecting Singaporeans.

A similar observation was made of consumers of dairy products, which comprise 11 food groups such as milk, Milo, Yakult, as well as butter in bread and ice cream.

Those who ate a median amount of 252g of dairy products a day had 7 and 10 per cent lower risk of hypertension and diabetes respectively, than those who did not.

These findings are from the Singapore Chinese Health Study, which was started in 1993 by NUS and covers some 63,000 Chinese participants here who are now 45 to 74 years old.

It was published in the *Journal Of Nutrition* in February.

The principal investigator is Professor Koh Woon Puay, 49, who holds positions at both the NUS Saw Swee Hock School of Public Health and the Duke-NUS Medical

School. Similar studies have been conducted in other countries, but *The Straits Times* understands that this is the first large-scale local study on the health benefits of milk.

Researchers followed up with the participants in phases, over a period of 10 years. They focused on only one racial group in order to standardise the methodology.

However, the health benefits are applicable to all racial groups and ages, said Prof Koh, as the results are consistent with 22 other studies from various countries.

Milk and dairy lower the risk of diabetes and hypertension, as they contain minerals such as calcium.

These minerals increase the body's insulin secretion and sensitivity, which in turn regulates blood sugar levels, she said.

Whey protein in milk also reduces the production of angiotensin, a protein which leads to higher blood pressure.

However, Asians drink less milk than people from other countries, she said.

Prof Koh said: "Sometimes, there's a misconception that the lactose intolerance gene is more common in Asians, but there has been no solid evidence to support this belief."

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The Singapore Chinese Health Study led by Professor Koh Woon Puay (left) was started in 1993 by the National University of Singapore and is based on 63,000 Chinese participants here.

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