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ARCHIVIST.....**Milk fats and asthma**

Studies performed mainly on adults have suggested that diet may influence asthma. Fruits, vitamin C, vitamin E, and beta-carotene may have a protective effect. Now a birth cohort study in the Netherlands (AH Wijga and colleagues. *Thorax* 2003;**58**:567–72) has provided evidence that in pre-school children the consumption of products containing milk fat might be protective.

The cohort consisted of 2978 children born in three different regions of the country between July 1996 and October 1997. Dietary data were collected when the children were 2 years old and related to data from postal questionnaires on respiratory symptoms at 3 years of age. Recent asthma at age 3 years was less prevalent (3.4% vs 5.6%) in children who at age 2 years had consumed full cream milk every day compared with other children. A similar reduction in recent asthma (1.5% vs 5.1%) was found in children who ate butter every day. The prevalence of recent wheeze was also reduced by daily consumption of milk products (13.7% vs 18.4%) or of butter (7.7% vs 15.4%). Rates of asthma or wheeze were also reduced with daily consumption of brown bread but were not affected by consumption of fruits, vegetables, margarine, or fish.

It is possible that the observed changes in intake of milk fats may be indicators of other aspects of lifestyle but the authors of this paper have been unable to identify such confounding factors. It is also possible, but unproved, that increased intake of saturated fat and reduced intake of polyunsaturated fatty acids might protect against the development of atopy.