



**For the week of  
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**Editor:**

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## Raw milk can give you a raw deal

### Where can I find a listing of fats (saturated, unsaturated, etc.) in raw cow's milk?

Unfortunately, you can't be certain what type of fat is in raw cow's milk — it all depends on the cow and its diet. And since, by definition, raw cow's milk undergoes no processing, it wouldn't be standardized in any way.

However, the issue of the type of fat in raw cow's milk is overshadowed by the safety risks of drinking it. In fact, in December 2005 in southwestern Washington state, at least 18 people, including 15 children under age 13, became ill from raw milk contaminated by *E. coli* O157:H7. Several children were hospitalized in critical condition, and may suffer from long-term kidney problems.

According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, more than 300 people in the United States became sick from drinking raw milk or eating products made from raw milk in 2001, and nearly 200 became ill from these products in 2002.

Although advocates of raw milk like to extol its virtues, food safety experts cringe, comparing it to playing Russian roulette. Simply put, raw milk contains all sorts of bacteria — some that are harmless or even beneficial, some that cause spoilage, and some, such as *E. coli* O157:H7, *Listeria monocytogenes*,

and *Salmonella typhimurium* DT-104, that can cause severe illness.

Before pasteurization became the norm, contaminated milk was linked to diseases such as typhoid fever, diphtheria, scarlet fever, dysentery, and even tuberculosis. Pasteurization doesn't sterilize milk, which would kill all of its organisms, but its moderate, precise heat treatment is designed to kill bacteria that cause illness without significantly changing its flavor and nutritional value. It also helps slow spoilage, allowing your milk to last longer. U.S. law requires all milk that is shipped between states to be pasteurized.

Another plus: During processing, vitamin D is added to milk. Raw milk contains little vitamin D, but adding it to milk helps the body absorb calcium. Getting enough vitamin D from the diet is especially important in dark winter months, when there's little sun to help the body produce the vitamin itself.

Got questions? The September/October 2004 issue of the FDA Consumer magazine has a comprehensive article on raw milk. It's available online at [http://www.fda.gov/fdac/features/2004/504\\_milk.html](http://www.fda.gov/fdac/features/2004/504_milk.html).

*Chow Line is a service of Ohio State University Extension and the Ohio Agricultural Research and Development Center. Send questions to Chow Line, c/o Martha Filipic, 2021 Coffey Road, Columbus, OH, 43210-1044, or [filipic.3@osu.edu](mailto:filipic.3@osu.edu).*