ESL 95: ALL ABOUT MILK

Welcome to Spotlight. I’m Adam Navis.

And I’m Liz Waid. Spotlight uses a special English method of broadcasting. It is easier for people to understand, no matter where in the world they live

Milk. This white liquid seems simple. Most human babies drink their mother’s breast milk. And when they grow up, some people drink milk from animals such as cows. Some people get milk from their own cow. Others drink store-bought milk from cows that live in huge factories. But milk is not as simple as it seems. Some people think it is the perfect food. Other people say adult humans should not drink it at all. Milk is different from many other foods; people cannot agree if it is healthy or not! Today’s Spotlight is on this global drink that causes a lot of arguments – milk!

Milk is a truly international drink. But it is more popular in some places than others. In 2015, a group of researchers studied which countries drank the most milk. The study was led by Gitanjali M. Singh and Renata Micha. The Washington Post reported on the study:

“Milk is more popular in Sweden and Iceland than anywhere else. Here people drank the most milk - more than 12 ounces per day on average. No wider area, however, likes milk more than Central Latin America. There, people drink more than eight ounces on average each day. Costa Rica, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Finland, and Sri Lanka, where adults drink more than ten ounces per day, also stand out. So do Mexico, Colombia, and Venezuela, and parts of Africa.”

Around the world, milk comes in many forms. Some people drink it fresh and raw from the cow. But most milk is processed. It is changed in some small way to prevent it from going bad. A common form of processing milk is pasteurization. This kills the bacteria that might cause disease.

Most milk also needs to be kept cold. But people use some processes to store milk without keeping it cold. Some milk is made into powder. Other milk is processed in very high heat. It can stay at room temperature for a long time.

People also get milk from many different animals. For example, much of India’s milk is from buffalos. People also drink milk from camels, sheep, and goats. In parts of Mongolia the traditional drink is milk from horses. People in Tibet make products like butter from the milk of large, hairy yaks. Any food made from milk is a dairy product. Cheese, yogurt, butter and ice-cream are just a few dairy products.

Scientists say that humans have been drinking milk from animals for almost 8,000 years. But over time, the way people produce that milk has changed. Today, in many places, milk is produced by huge companies. Thousands of cows are often kept very close together. Their milk is combined in huge containers. Then it is put into small plastic or glass containers. People buy these from their local store. But the milk has often travelled many miles from the cows that gave it.

The business of milk and dairy products is a multi-billion dollar global industry. And this industry is connected to many systems. Farmers who raise cows want people to buy more milk and dairy products. There are even huge advertising projects encouraging people to drink milk. But there is an important question to ask. Is cow’s milk really a healthy drink for humans? The answer to this is complex. And people have many different opinions.

Some people think milk is a very healthy drink. But many people cannot drink milk at all. About 60 percent of people have trouble digesting lactose - the sugar in milk. Their bodies cannot break down the lactose. Milk will make these people sick. But for those who can drink it, milk may be a good food. Milk contains many things the body needs to be healthy. It especially contains the vitamins and minerals to build strong bones and teeth.

But some people do not think milk is good for adult humans. One reason is that milk is very high in fat. There is a way to remove some or all of the fat from milk. But this process changes the milk. Milk is also high in cholesterol. They say people can have a healthy diet without milk.

If milk comes from cows in large factory farms it may also have other substances in it. These cows sometimes receive chemical hormones or strong medicines. These substances are then in the milk of the cows. And they may harm the people who drink the milk.

For people who do not want to, or cannot, drink dairy milk there are also many other drinks to choose from. In some places, you can buy drinks like milk made from different nuts or grains. A drink made from soybeans is popular in many countries. And some people think these other foods are just healthier than dairy products. Dr. Lovneet Batra is an expert on healthy foods. She lives in Delhi, India. India produces the most milk in the world. Dr. Batra tells the Times of India that there are other ways to gain the nutrients and vitamins in milk:

“Drinking milk is not a need. Nutrients found in milk can be found in other food sources such as whole grains, lentils and nuts.”

Around the world today, dairy is one of the largest food businesses in the world. But the question is still unanswered: should people drink milk or not? Marion Nestle is a professor of nutrition, food studies and public health at New York University. She says that there is no ‘right’ answer. Nestle wrote a book called Food Politics. In it, she writes that there is nothing special about milk:

“Milk is just a food. There is nothing special about it. Cow's milk is not necessary. And it is not perfect - at least not for humans. But cow's milk also is not a poison. You do not have to drink milk to be healthy. But if you like drinking it, you can do so and also stay healthy."

What about you? Do you think that milk is healthy for humans and the world? Do you drink milk? Tell us what you think. You can leave a comment on our website. Or email us at radio@radioenglish.net. You can also comment on Facebook at Facebook.com/spotlightradio.

The writer of this program was Rena Dam. The producer was Michio Ozaki. The voices you heard were from the United States and the United Kingdom. All quotes were adapted for this program and voiced by Spotlight. You can listen to this program again, and read it, on the internet at www.radioenglish.net. This program is called, ‘All About Milk’.