Raw milk is milk from cows, sheep or goats that has not been pasteurized to kill harmful bacteria. Pasteurization is the process of heating milk to kill illness-causing bacteria that could be in the milk. Pasteurization was invented in a time when millions of people became sick and died of diseases transmitted through raw milk. Since its introduction more than a century ago, pasteurization has saved lives and prevented people from becoming ill. Pasteurization is used around the world as an essential tool for ensuring that milk and dairy products are unquestionably safe. In part because of pasteurization, dairy foods in the U.S. are among the safest in the world, with dairy foods involved in less than 1.5 percent of annual foodborne illness outbreaks in this country.

There are no health benefits from drinking raw milk that cannot be obtained from drinking pasteurized milk. The process of pasteurization of milk has never been found to be the cause of chronic diseases, allergies, developmental or behavioral problems. Both raw and pasteurized milk can cause reactions to people sensitive to milk proteins, the cause of an allergy.

The Food and Drug Administration (FDA), the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), the American Medical Association and the American Academy of Pediatrics recommend drinking only pasteurized milk.
**CAN DRINKING PASTEURIZED MILK CAUSE LACTOSE INTOLERANCE?**

No. Lactose intolerance occurs when the body has a hard time digesting the natural sugar called lactose, in milk. Lactose is present in the same amount in both raw milk and pasteurized milk.

**THERE ARE PEOPLE WHO CLAIM THEY’VE BEEN DRINKING RAW MILK FOR A LONG TIME AND NEVER GOT SICK FROM IT. WHY IS THAT?**

The presence of harmful bacteria in raw milk is unpredictable. The number of disease-causing germs in raw milk may be too low to make a person sick, and later high enough to make the same person seriously ill. For some people, drinking contaminated raw milk just once could make them really sick. Even if you trust the farmer and your store, raw milk is never a guaranteed safe product.

**DOES PASTEURIZATION CHANGE MILK’S NUTRITIONAL BENEFITS?**

Pasteurized milk provides all the nutrition of raw milk, without the risk of disease or death. Pasteurization does not significantly change the nutritional value of milk and dairy products. While the heating process of pasteurization does inactivate some enzymes in milk, the enzymes in raw milk are not important in human health. Additionally, all pasteurized milk is fortified with Vitamin D, a necessary nutrient for calcium absorption. Raw milk contains little Vitamin D. ²

**DO THE SANITARY AND HUMANE CONDITIONS DAIRY FARMERS USE TO RAISE THEIR ANIMALS REDUCE MILK CONTAMINATION?**

Dairy farmers take many precautions to keep milk safe and wholesome. However, adherence to good hygienic practices during milking reduces, but doesn’t eliminate, the risk of milk contamination. Milk is a nutritious liquid, which also makes it inviting for germ growth. No matter how clean a dairy farm is, no farm is germ-free. And even with the precautions dairy farmers take in producing milk, they cannot guarantee that their raw milk or products made from raw milk are free of harmful bacteria.

Make wise food choices. When in doubt - ask. Taking a few moments to make sure milk is pasteurized can protect you and your family from serious illness.

- Read the label. Safe milk will have the word pasteurized on the label. If the word pasteurized does not appear on a product’s label, it may contain raw milk.
- Don’t hesitate to ask your grocer or store clerk whether their dairy products are pasteurized, especially milk or milk products sold in refrigerated cases at grocery or health food stores.
- Don’t buy milk or milk products at farm stands or farmers’ markets unless you can confirm that it has been pasteurized.³

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³ U.S. Food and Drug Administration, http://www.fda.gov/Food/ResourcesForYou/consumers/ucm079516.htm