

BfR does not see any association between progesterone levels in milk and breast cancer

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The Federal Institute for Risk Assessment (BfR) expresses its opinion on a possible association between rising milk consumption and the onset of cancer. In particular breast and prostate cancer are said to be attributable to the increased consumption of milk and dairy products. The reasons given are the natural, hormonal ingredients in milk. Besides carbohydrates, proteins, vitamins and trace elements, milk also contains hormones like, for instance, progesterone.

Progesterone is a female sexual hormone and is mainly formed in the ovaries. The production of the hormone is subject to natural fluctuations. For instance, gestating cows produce higher levels of progesterone shortly before giving birth.

Against this backdrop BfR has voiced its opinion on whether a health risk is to be expected from progesterone that is ingested naturally from the consumption of milk and dairy products.

The conclusion in this assessment is that the daily production of sexual hormones in humans is far higher than the levels of hormones ingested from food. Furthermore, dietary progesterone cannot simply be used by the body and transported to its sites of action in the tissue cells. It is far more the case that it is degraded by the liver and excreted by the kidneys. In the case of normal eating habits the health risk is, therefore, deemed to be very low.

The full version of this BfR Opinion is available in German on http://www.bfr.bund.de/cm/208/bfr_sieht_keine_assoziaton_zwischen_dem_progesterongehalt_in_milch_und_brustkrebs.pdf