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Cheesy Myths, Explained

The human relationship with the world of cheese abounds with fear, folk tales and myths, from [turophobia](#) to just plain misunderstanding. Let's slice through a few.

"I'm lactose intolerant, therefore I can't eat cheese."

Not true. Lactose intolerant people can eat cheese without problems. Let's see why. On average, cow milk is about 88 percent water, 4.7 percent lactose, 3.5 percent fat, 3.3 percent protein, and 0.5 percent ash. In the production of cheese, cultures are added; sometimes, molds, depending on the type of cheese; and rennet. Rennet acts to cause the proteins to bind together (form a curd) and trap most of the fat in the protein matrix. In all firm/hard cheeses, such as cheddar, swiss, gouda, parmesan, and others, as well as most soft cheeses such as chevre, mozzarella, brie, and others, the curd is drained to remove most (85-90 percent) of the water (whey). Lactose is in the whey, so most lactose is drained away. The lactose that remains in the cheese curd is used as an energy source by the bacteria that were added to produce acids and various other flavor compounds. Consequently, very little lactose, if any, is left in finished cheese. Harder cheeses have less lactose remaining than softer cheeses.

“Uh-oh, the best-by date on this cheese is past, it must be bad, I better throw it out.”

Not true. Just because the best-by date has passed, it doesn't mean that the cheese is a food safety hazard. This is particularly true for longer aged cheeses such as cheddar, gouda, parmesan, etc. As the cheese moves past the best-by date, there might be a very slow change in the flavor and texture, but not an increase in food safety issues. The best-by date is for the distributor and retailer to help manage the rotation of stock.

“Oops, I see a spot of mold on that cheese, it must be bad.”

Not true. A spot of environmental mold or even a number of spots can be scraped off the cheese without any worry about food safety. Mold needs oxygen and will only grow on the surface. In a cheese aging facility, it is routine practice to scrape off unwanted mold from the surface of the aging cheese.

Cheese is your friend. There are numerous choices of flavors and cheese is a good source of protein, phosphorus, selenium, vitamin B12, riboflavin, and calcium. As renowned chef Anthony Bourdain once said, “You must be a romantic to invest yourself, your money, and your time in cheese.”

A couple of cheesy links.

<https://www.wisconsincheese.com/about-cheese/cheese-fact>

[Cheese.com - World's Greatest Cheese Resource](#)

Mark Newbold is not only a [tuophile](#), he's a chemist and former head cheesemaker at an award-winning artisanal creamery in Upstate New York, where he developed new goat milk products, maintained food quality and safety plans for all manufacturing operations, and supervised all production, packaging, and shipping efforts. He previously served as a research support specialist for the Department of Food Science at Cornell University. Active at the Northeast Dairy Foods Research Center at Cornell, Mark works with AlterEcho clients on a range of product safety and regulatory initiatives.