

Say Cheese!

- 1 FOR those who enjoy a slice of creamy camembert or a wedge of cheddar, be thankful our ancestors were lactose intolerant.
- 2 Scientists have analysed a collection of pottery fragments, approximately 5000 years old, that are laced with milk fat and believe they provide the earliest evidence of cheesemaking. The researchers suspect early European farmers, who had not developed the biological enzymes to process lactose as adults, turned milk into cheese because it was easier to digest.
- 3 “Keeping cows for their milk was a major innovation in prehistoric societies, enabling the supply of nutritious food without the slaughtering of precious livestock,” the study’s lead author, chemist Richard Evershed said. Professor Evershed’s international team suggest that the 50 pottery fragments, from 34 specialised pottery vessels, were used by early farmers as sieves to separate the fat-rich curd from the whey that contained lactose.
- 4 With sophisticated analytic techniques Professor Evershed and his colleagues were able to show that the presence of fatty acids residue in the pots was linked to milk processing. Turning milk into cheese made it suitable for consumption for populations with limited dairy exposure and easier to transport. Besides, cheese could be stored longer than milk, which meant the nutritional benefits of dairy were available year round.



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