

MILK & MILK ALTERNATIVES

UPDATED OCTOBER 28, 2022

Research shows that drinking milk can have a beneficial impact on bone health, blood pressure, heart disease, diabetes prevention, and weight management. Dairy products are also a great source of protein for toddler. WIC provides cow milk and other dairy products to participants over 12 months of age.

WIC-allowed cow's milk

- A source of protein, calcium, B12, potassium, phosphorus, magnesium, and zinc.
- Available in regular or lactose-free.
- Fortified with Vitamin D.

WIC also provides soy beverage and tofu as a milk alternative for participants who do not use milk due to milk allergy, lactose intolerance, vegan/vegetarian diet, cultural/lifestyle practice, or religious observance. Soy beverage has a protein content similar to cow's milk but does not naturally contain calcium and many of the other nutrients. WIC-allowed soy beverages have been specially fortified with additional nutrients such as calcium, vitamins A, D, and B12, and riboflavin, and have added protein to be more nutritionally equivalent to cow's milk and to meet WIC requirements.

IMPORTANT NOTE: Plant-based milks are **NOT** recommended for children under age 5.

Only fortified soy beverages, such as the WIC options, are considered adequate nutritional equivalents for dairy milk in terms of calcium, protein, and vitamin D. Some other milk alternatives may also have nutrients added, but fortification amounts vary widely, and not all of the nutrients naturally occurring in cow milk are added to milk alternatives. Additionally, the bioavailability of added nutrients is unknown; evidence suggests that our bodies may not absorb these nutrients as well as they can from dairy sources.

Flavored milk alternatives also contain added sugars and other sweeteners. The *American Heart Association* has recommended avoiding sweetened milk beverages to minimize the intake of added sugars that contribute to a preference for sweet tastes, and negatively impact nutrient intake and diet quality. **Cow milk has no "added sugars"**.

Walking into a grocery store today you can find many different milk alternatives, and many are marketed as a healthier beverage than cow's milk, but are they? The comparison chart on the following page can be used to enhance your knowledge on how cow's milk really compares to milk alternatives.

Nutrient Comparisons for Fortified Milk Alternatives - per 1 Cup

 Naturally High in Nutrient

 Fortified with Nutrient

Type of Milk	Protein (grams)	Total Fat (grams)	Added Sugar (grams)	Calcium	Vitamin D
Cow (Safe for nut/soy allergy)					
Whole	8	8	0		
2%	8	5	0		
1%	8	3	0		
Skim	8	0	0		
Lactose Free					
Whole	8	8	0		
Skim	8	0	0		
Goat	8	10	0		
Soy Plain (Lactose Free)	8	5	6*		
Soy Vanilla (Lactose Free)	6	4	9*		
Almond Plain (Lactose Free)	2	1	7*		
Almond Vanilla (Lactose Free)	1	3	13*		
Coconut (Lactose Free) (Safe for nut/soy allergy)	1	5	6*		
Rice (Lactose Free) (Safe for nut/soy allergy)	1	2	13*		
Pea (Lactose Free) (Safe for nut/soy allergy)	8	5	6*		
Cashew (Lactose Free)	4	5	3*		
Oat (Lactose Free) (Safe for nut/soy allergy)	3	5	7*		
Hemp Flax (Lactose Free) (Safe for nut/soy allergy)	2	3	1*		

* Typical amounts listed. Specific nutrient content will vary by brand. Numbers are rounded to the next whole number.

Nutrient information source: [USDA Food Data Central](#); [Food Allergy Institute](#); [Healthy Drinks Healthy Kids](#).

Things to consider when counseling:

Let's take a look at a few reasons why a participant may request a milk alternative.

They have a milk allergy.

If the participant has an allergy to the milk protein (much less common), assess their knowledge and interest in discussing ways to assure nutrient adequacy, such as label reading and ideas about other sources of calcium in the diet. Soy beverage may be offered as an alternative if there is not a soy allergy.

They think milk alternative is healthier.

Affirm, the participant's desire to eat a healthy diet. Explain that WIC can provide WIC-allowed soy beverages as a milk alternative with a high nutrition value.

They just prefer a milk alternative.

If the participant states they want a milk alternative due to taste or a preference for plant-based foods, share that WIC-allowed soy beverage is the most similar to the nutrition in cow's milk.

- Encourage the participant to read labels to make sure any milk substitutes that are purchased are fortified with calcium and vitamin D. Protein and limited added sugar content might also be considerations.
- Explore whether the participant is open to eating other dairy products such as cheese and yogurt since calcium found in dairy products is more easily absorbed by the body.

If a participant does not drink milk or milk alternatives at all, then explore their interest in discussing ways to use milk or soy beverage in cooking, and/or using other dietary sources of calcium on a daily basis.

Their toddler and/or older children refuse milk or soy beverage.

Some toddlers, especially 12-month-olds, are slow to accept milk, especially if they are used to breastmilk or formula. See the tips below to help parents with introducing dairy or dairy products to their child.

Tips to encourage milk acceptance:

- Remember that it may take some time for the transition to milk. Be consistent in offering a small amount of milk in a cup at each meal.
- Mix a little formula with milk, if the child drinks formula, to help accustom the child to the taste.
- Model drinking milk at meals by serving the adults milk too.
- Discuss with parents that it is normal for toddlers to drink smaller quantities of milk from a cup than from a bottle because they are getting nutrition from other foods.

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- If a toddler is breastfeeding, each feeding is a serving of milk. If the toddler is nursing 4x per day, they are getting their dairy requirement. It is ok to serve small quantities of cow's milk in a cup at meals to introduce the toddler to the taste. Then when the child weans from the breast, they will already be used to the taste of milk.
- If a child refuses to drink milk, parents may be interested in discussing ways to use milk in cooking, in preparing hot cereals, and/or providing other food sources of calcium. Remember that the child needs those consistent calcium and protein foods every day!

Parents want to choose the very best for their children. WIC staff can use [Participant Centered Services](#) (PCS) to counsel and educate participants. Knowing the facts provides families with the information they need to make the healthiest choice for themselves and their children.

Resources for Parents:

[Recommended Drinks for Children Age 5 & Younger](#) [Healthychildren.org](#) (AAP)

[Healthy Drinks. Healthy Kids. Parents and Caregivers](#) [HealthyDrinksHealthyKids.org](#)

[Healthy Drinks. Healthy Kids. Healthy Beverage Consumption in Early Childhood](#)
[HealthDrinksHealthyKids.org](#)

[Cow's Milk and Milk Alternatives](#) [Center for Disease Control and Prevention \(CDC\)](#)

Reference – Complete Listing of Hyperlinks:

[USDA Food Data Central \(https://fdc.nal.usda.gov/index.html\)](https://fdc.nal.usda.gov/index.html)

[Food Allergy Institute \(https://www.foodallergy.org/\)](https://www.foodallergy.org/)

[Healthy Drinks Healthy Kids \(https://healthydrinkshealthykids.org/parents/\)](https://healthydrinkshealthykids.org/parents/)

[Participant Centered Services](#)

(<https://www.health.state.mn.us/people/wic/localagency/training/pcs/skills/counseling.html>)

[Recommended Drinks for Children Age 5 & Younger](#)

(<https://www.healthychildren.org/English/healthy-living/nutrition/Pages/Recommended-Drinks-for-Young-Children-Ages-0-5.aspx>)

[Healthy Drinks. Healthy Kids. Parents and Caregivers](#)

(<https://healthydrinkshealthykids.org/parents/>)

[Healthy Drinks. Healthy Kids. Healthy Beverage Consumption in Early Childhood](#)

(https://healthydrinkshealthykids.org/app/uploads/2019/09/HDHK_One_Pager_Plant-Based-Non-Dairy-Milks.pdf)

[Cow's Milk and Milk Alternatives](#)

(<https://www.cdc.gov/nutrition/infantandtoddlernutrition/foods-and-drinks/cows-milk-and-milk-alternatives.html>)

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