



Dairy Alternatives



Loved by people around the world, dairy products include nutritious and delicious foods. But for those who are lactose intolerant, have milk allergies, or choose to follow a vegan diet, eating dairy may not be an option

If you're one of those people, take heart – there are alternatives you can enjoy that will give you some of the pleasure of dairy – without any downside! You can choose from a variety of lactose-free products including milk, cheese, and yogurt made with plant-based substitutes.

Here's a roundup of some of the more popular alternatives:

Non-Dairy Milk

These plant-based milks can be found in both unsweetened and sweetened versions. Sweetened milks contain ingredients such as cane sugar, brown rice syrup, or evaporated cane juice and added flavorings like vanilla. These added sugars add a pleasant taste, but keep an eye out for added calories. Check the ingredient list and Nutrition Facts Panel to know exactly what you're buying.

The following discusses the calories, fat, fiber and protein content for each of these non-dairy milks, and the chart below compares them to 2% cow's milk:

Almond milk is made from ground almonds and water. A cup has only $\frac{1}{4}$ of the calories of 2% milk and about half the fat; as an added bonus, its fats are "healthy" fats. That one cup serving also contains a gram of fiber, something not found in cow's milk, but there's very little protein (just 1 gram, compared to 8 grams in a cup of cow's milk).

Coconut milk (not to be confused with coconut water) is made from the liquid of the grated meat of a brown coconut. Coconut milk found in a can is rich, thick and creamy in texture – and very high in calories and fat. One cup has around 550 calories! However, coconut milk found in the dairy aisle in refrigerated cartons has been "watered down" so it's less caloric and doesn't contain as much fat. This version has around 70 calories for an eight-ounce serving along with 4 grams of fat, 1 gram of fiber, but no protein.

Hemp milk is made from hemp seeds that are soaked and ground creating a creamy nutty tasting drink. While a cup has about the same amount of fat as 2% cow's milk, the fats are "good" fats – including omega-3s; hemp milk also has 2 grams of fiber per cup and about one-third the protein of cow's milk.

Tip

When baking, creamy almond and hemp milk are generally a good option, along with soy, but remember each has a distinctive taste and flavor profile. Rice milk is thinner in consistency, which should be taken into consideration when cooking or baking. Coconut milk adds a nice flavor to smoothies, and unflavored soymilk and coconut milk in the can (look for lite versions) are a good choice for savory recipes, especially Asian-inspired dishes.



Oat milk is made from oat groats (the hulled kernel of the oat grain) and water; some brands are a mix of oats and other grains. A one-cup serving has 130 calories, contains 2.5 grams of fat, 2 grams of fiber, and 4 grams of protein, but the naturally-occurring sugars bring the carbohydrate content to 24 grams. (In comparison, a serving of 2% milk has 11.4 grams of carbohydrate.)

Rice milk is made from boiled rice (both brown rice and white rice versions are available). It has a watery consistency and to help it taste more like cow's milk, flavor enhancers like brown rice syrup and vanilla are often added. Most brands have about the same number of calories as 2% cow's milk and about half the fat. Unlike other plant-based dairy substitutes, rice milk has little or no fiber.

Soy milk is a liquid extract of soybeans. It's higher in protein than other dairy substitutes, containing nearly the same amount as cow's milk, around 7 grams per eight-ounce serving. It has about the same number of calories as skim milk, with healthy fats and about a gram of fiber.

Yogurt

Just like the dairy milk substitutes listed above, there are a variety of non-dairy yogurts to choose from including soy, almond, hemp and coconut milk products. They have similar attributes to the non-dairy milks listed above.

Tip: Look for yogurts with a short list of ingredients including the milk substitute and live and active cultures. Words like honey, high fructose corn syrup, highly processed fruit extracts, cane sugar, rice syrup, to name a few, are a clue that there's sugar – and added calories – in each serving.

Cheese

Today, we can choose from a variety of non-dairy “cheese” products, many of them based on soy, rice and hemp milk, which mimic the taste of cheddar, mozzarella and provolone.

Tip

For all these dairy substitute products, be sure to read the ingredient lists to ensure that you're not inadvertently eating a form of dairy. Words to look out for include:

- Casein
- Caseinates (in the form of calcium, potassium, sodium, magnesium and ammonium)
- Curds
- Ghee
- Hydrolysates
- Lactalbumin
- Lactoglobulin
- Lactose
- Lactulose
- Rennet casein
- Whey



A Word about Nutrition

A concern for many non-dairy eaters is whether they're replacing the calcium and vitamin D found in dairy products. Fortunately, most vitamins and nutrients in dairy foods can be found in a variety of plant-based foods as well as foods that have been fortified, so eating a balanced diet of vegetables and fruit, whole grains, fish and lean meats (for non-vegan/vegetarians), beans, legumes, nuts and seeds is important. For example, calcium-rich foods include leafy greens, broccoli, almonds, and quinoa, while mushrooms are a natural source of vitamin D. Some non-dairy milks are also fortified with calcium, to make them more comparable nutritionally to cow's milk.

Non-Dairy Milks and 2% Cow's Milk Comparison

Nutrition information for unsweetened non-dairy milks provided by national brands
Serving size: One cup (eight ounces)

Milk	Calories	Fat (grams)	Fiber (grams)	Protein (grams)
2% Cow's Milk	125	4.8	0	8
Almond Milk	30	2.5	1	1
Coconut Milk	45	4	1	0
Hemp Milk	70	5	2	3
Oat Milk	130	2.5	2	4
Rice Milk	120	2.5	0	1
Soy milk	80	4	1.2	7