



February Product Corner

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The Good and Not So Good Features of Your Milk Options

It seems like yesterday when navigating a supermarket dairy case for milk was an easy task. Today the dairy case is overwhelming, offering soy, hemp, almond, coconut milk and more. Functionally and nutritionally, these milk products are very different, but which is best? Like every answer to “what should I eat?”, it’s more complicated than that and it depends on a person’s health status and preference.

The surge of plant-based milks has been fueled by a growing interest in vegan diets, adults who are intolerant to lactose, a sugar found in cow’s milk, as well as efforts to lower cholesterol.

However, they are not nutritionally superior, and do not deserve the health halo attached to them. The effect that dairy has on one’s health is far from definitive and the negative hype about cow’s milk has not been found to be justified. Studies claiming that dairy causes cancer is offset by studies showing that dairy prevents cancer. Ones indicating that dairy causes weight gain are countered by studies demonstrating that dairy supports weight loss. Additionally, for those who want to avoid saturated fat, or are lactose intolerant, there are many low fat and lactose free varieties of cow’s milk available.

Cow’s milk is actually the best option in many cases, particularly for infants and toddlers who require the calories, fat, protein calcium and Vitamin D for healthy development. Some of the plant-based varieties lack one or more of these essential nutrients. For example, cow’s milk has 8 grams of protein per serving, but oat, rice, almond and coconut milk typically have only 0-1 gram per serving. Additionally, many have extra sugar added and unlike cow’s milk, not all of the alternate milks are fortified with calcium and vitamin B12.

The controversy around milk is endless but to provide more clarity, the following is a summary of the different kinds of milk on the market and how they differ.



Cow's milk

The good

- High in complete protein (has all the essential amino acids the body needs to use protein effectively)
- High in vitamin B12 (required for brain function, nervous system and blood health)
- High in calcium; provides 29% of the daily recommended intake
- It's alkaline, reducing acidity in the mouth, which helps prevent tooth decay

The not so good

- Higher in saturated fat (4.6 grams of saturated fat in 1 cup whole milk; 3.1 grams in 1 cup 2% milk; 1.5 grams in one cup 1% milk. Choose the skim version to eliminate saturated fat)

Almond milk

The good

- Free of cholesterol and lactose
- High in healthy fats, and low in sodium, for heart health
- High in Vitamin E (50 % of daily recommended intake) for healthy skin and magnesium and selenium for bone, immune system and metabolic health
- Unsweetened varieties provide a good nutrient return for the calories: (i.e.; for only 30 calories, has 0 grams of sugar, and 45% of your daily calcium, which is even higher than cow's milk)

The not so good

- Almond milk is very low in protein
- Some versions have sweeteners and stabilizers to make its taste and texture more like cow's milk

Oat milk

The good

- High in soluble fiber
- Contains more B vitamins than coconut and soy milk
- Good alternative for people with nut and soy allergies

The not so good

- Contains more fat than other milk alternatives.
- Low in protein, vitamins and minerals

Hemp milk

The good

- High in omega-3 fatty acids for heart health
- 3 grams of protein per cup – more than most other plant-based milks, but less than cow's milk

The not so good

- More fat than most other milk options

Rice milk

The good

- Very low in fat
- Most hypoallergenic of all the milk options
- High levels of magnesium to control blood pressure

The not so good

- Not as high in calcium or protein as cow's milk.
- Contains high levels of carbohydrates and sugars
- Highest in calories

Soy milk

The good

- A complete protein (like cow's milk) and highest in protein as compared to other plant-based milks
- Low in sodium and shown to reduce LDL ("bad") cholesterol

The not so good

- Soy estrogens from soy milk can affect hormonal balance
- Higher in fat and lowest in calcium as compared to other milks

Coconut milk

The good

- Lower in calories (approx.45 calories per cup)
- Creamy texture, similar to cow's milk, making it a good substitute in recipes
- Many prefer taste over other alternative milks

The not so good

- Has no protein.
- High in saturated fat

