

Milk and Milk Alternatives

Milk alternative products have been on the market for years. They are often recommended to those following special diets requiring them to limit some of the nutrients found in cow's milk. With so many options to choose from, many of us are wondering: What is the difference between these milk alternatives? Can the same amount of a milk alternative be used in cooking and baking in place of cow's milk? Please read on and I will answer all these questions and more.

The best place to start answering these questions is by examining what makes the original product an important part of our diets. Cow's milk boasts health benefits ranging from promoting growth in children, acting as a popular recovery drink for athletes, and preventing bone loss to name a few. The nutrients that contribute to these benefits are from protein, calcium, phosphorus, Vitamin A, and Vitamin D present in milk and dairy products. Whether choosing whole milk (sometimes referred to as Vitamin D milk), reduced fat (2%), low-fat (1%), or skim, the vitamin, mineral, protein, and carbohydrate content of milk is the same.

The 2015- 2020 Guidelines for Americans recommend low-fat dairy as part of a healthy diet. Why? Saturated fat, which is part of the total fat content of a food may cause a build-up of cholesterol in our blood vessels.



Foods low in saturated fat is recommended to reduce the risk of heart disease.

Other considerations:

- Cow's milk is lower cost option
- Lactose free cow's milk still costs less than plant-based milk alternatives
- Almondmilk and ricemilk generally cost less than other plant milks.

Milk and Plant "Milk" Nutrient Comparison For One Cup

	CALORIES	CARBOHYDRATES	PROTEIN	TOTAL FAT	SATURATED FAT	CALCIUM
1% COW'S	100	12 grams	8 grams	2.4 g	1.5 grams	293 mg
SOYMILK	80- 110	7- 9 grams	7-8 grams	2.5- 4.5 g	0 grams	300- 450 mg
PEAMILK	70	Less than 1 gram	8 grams	4.5 grams	0 grams	465 mg
RICEMILK	120	23 grams	1 gram	2.5 grams	0 grams	20 mg
OATMILK	120	16 grams	3 grams	5 grams	0.5 grams	250 mg
ALMONDMILK	60	8 grams	1 gram	2.5 grams	0 grams	450 mg
COCONUTMILK	60	5 grams	1 gram	4.5 grams	4 grams	62 mg
HEMP MILK	80	1 gram	2 grams	6- 8 g	0.5- 1 grams	300 mg

What are Milk Alternatives?

Most milk alternatives available are made by combining a bean, grain, nut, seed, or fruit with water, blending the mixture, and straining the pulp. They may separate in the refrigerator and should be shaken before use. They usually last 7-10 days refrigerated after opening. Vitamins, minerals, flavorings, stabilizers, and sweeteners are often added. Because of this process, the nutrient content of these beverages varies. Flavored versions will have higher carbohydrate content because of added sugars and different companies add different amounts of vitamins and minerals.



Types of Plant-based Milk Alternatives

- **Legume (Bean) Milks** include soymilk and pea milk. Soymilk is the option with a nutrient profile closest to cow's milk. Soy and pea-based milk beverages have **the most protein** and have creamy textures that remain stable when heated.
- **Nut and Seed Milks** include beverages made from hemp seeds, almonds, cashews, and other nuts. These tend to be **lowest in carbohydrates, protein, and calories**.
- **Grain Milks**, most made from rice or oats, are higher in calories and contain very little protein.
- **Coconut Milk** is found refrigerated and in cans. The canned products have fewer additives and are used in cooking. Refrigerated coconut milk is made with more water and has a less intense coconut flavor. Coconut milk is the alternative with the most saturated fat. Canned coconut milk may have up to 12 g saturated fat.

References:

- <https://www.ams.usda.gov/sites/default/files/media/RetailMilkPrices.pdf>
- <https://us.oatly.com/>
- <https://hudsonriverfoods.com/collections/tempt-hemp>

Cooking with Milk Alternatives

Milk alternatives can be substituted 1:1 for milk in recipes. When choosing which one to use in cooking, consider the flavor of the beverage and how well that goes with the flavors in your recipe. Is the milk alternative more nutty or sweet? A sweetened nut milk may pair better with cereal or in a smoothie while one with a nutty taste is a better addition for a soup.

When used in place of whole milk, oil may need to be added if using a low-fat plant-based milk.

Benefits of Milk Alternatives

Because dairy-free milk alternatives are made from plants and water, they usually have a longer shelf-life.

Most are also **lower in saturated fat**. A **variety of nutrient profiles** make plant-based milk alternatives **great options for people with food allergies** as well as those following special diets. There are milk alternatives low in carbohydrates, protein, phosphorus, and calories to meet different dietary needs.

Things to Look For

Sneaky Added Sugars

Many milk alternatives are flavored or sweetened which can double the calorie content in some cases.

Different Flavor Profiles

The same type of milk alternative may taste different from another brand.

Nutrition

Most milk alternatives are fortified with calcium and other vitamins and minerals found in cow's milk. Many are not good sources of protein.

Bottom Line

With the increased popularity in plant-based diets, milk alternative products are becoming more common. There are many options to choose from and I hope you feel better equipped to choose the best milk for you.

Need a Dietitian?

Registered Dietitians are here to help you with your nutrition questions. To make an appointment call 412.692.4497 (Oakland location) or 412.623.2421 (Shadyside location).

- <https://www.cookinglight.com/news/how-to-stop-non-dairy-almond-milk-from-curdling-in-coffee>
- <https://www.pacificfoods.com/>
- <https://www.8thcontinent.com/products/original/>