

Understanding Non-Dairy Milk Alternatives

Cow's milk has always been the gold standard as a nutrient-rich beverage. Recently, there have been several other non-dairy options available including soy, rice, almond, and hemp beverages. More importantly, consumers have raised questions on how these beverages compare to cow's milk.



Fast Facts

Q: Why drink cow's milk?

A: Cow's milk not only provides high-quality complete protein, but is also an excellent source of calcium, and seven other nutrients needed to build healthy bodies. As the gold standard, other beverages use cow's milk as a nutritional benchmark for quality, nutrient density and taste.

Q: How do other beverages measure up to calcium and protein found in cow's milk?

A: These beverages are not a nutritional powerhouse like cow's milk and more importantly, these beverages are not technically milk. The nutritional and caloric content of these products vary depending on the brand, so it is important to check the Nutrition Facts panel for the nutritional content. Let's take a look at some of the basic facts about these non-dairy beverages:

Soy Beverages: Made from soybeans and contain five to seven grams of soy protein, but the soy protein is a lower quality protein than the eight grams of complete protein found in cow's milk. Soy milk is fortified with calcium, but the amount of calcium is not standardized.

Rice Beverages: Generally processed from brown rice and is fortified with nutrients such as calcium and vitamin D. Rice contains almost no protein.

Almond "Nut Based" Beverages: Roasted almonds are blended resulting in a liquid that is then fortified with nutrients (like calcium, vitamin D and Vitamin E). At only one gram of protein per serving, it also lacks the natural benefits found in almonds.

Hemp "Seed Based" Beverages: This is a newer milk substitute that is commercially available. Hemp milk contains Omega-3 and Omega-6 fatty acids which have made them popular, but it also falls short on protein content. Hemp milk may be fortified with calcium, but does not contain a natural source of calcium.

Q: What about Lactose Intolerance? Do I need to drink a non-dairy beverage option?

A: Individuals who are lactose intolerant can drink lactose-free milk products and do not need to choose non-dairy milk alternatives. In lactose-free products, the milk sugar, lactose, has been completely broken down; and nutritionally it compares to regular cow's milk.

Review the Research

According to research published in the American Journal of Clinical Nutrition, the calcium in cow's milk is absorbed 25% better than that found in soy milk. Non-Dairy milk alternatives do not replace the unique package of nutrients contained in dairy products beyond calcium, such as phosphorus, magnesium, vitamin D and protein.



***It's easy:** Cow's milk is considered a complete protein because it supplies the body with all the necessary amino acids needed to form proteins. It is fortified with vitamin D to facilitate the absorption of calcium. Additionally, vitamin A is added to cow's milk.*

Choosing Three Servings Every Day

Nutrient-rich dairy including milk, cheese and yogurt and lactose-free or lactose-reduced milk as needed, are strategies children and adults can use to get at least three servings of dairy in their everyday diet. Cow's milk is an excellent nutritional and economic value. It provides nine key nutrients, many of which are shortfall nutrients for both children and adults in the United States, including calcium, potassium and Vitamin D. Milk beverage imitators fall short nutritionally when compared to great-tasting cow's milk.

For more information visit NationalDairyCouncil.org