

# What to eat when dairy's off the menu

Take a dim view of dairy and you're stuck with a short menu, right? Wrong – the choice of non-dairy delights will last until the cows come home

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**W**e're a nation of dairy devotees. Every year, the average person consumes

almost 200 pints of milk, 11,100g of cheese and 3700g of butter. The now-defunct Milk Marketing Board may be partially responsible, with its history of campaigns encouraging us to drink more of the white stuff as a vital source of nutrients for strong teeth and healthy bones. But despite milk being promoted for years as a near-perfect food, an increasing number of us are choosing to drop dairy from our diets.

Allergies are a common reason. According to the Royal College of Physicians, one in three people suffer, with cow's milk the most common cause. But allergies aren't the only reason for chucking out the cheese. Some controversial research suggests that too much dairy may increase the risk of hormonal cancers such as breast and prostate. While other experts believe that dairy foods can increase production of mucus in the body, so they advise you to lay off milk, cheese and yogurt if you've got a cold. There are also claims that dairy can aggravate inflammation, so it's best if people with asthma, arthritis or dermatitis eat as little of it as possible.

**It's not a black and white issue but, if you prefer to avoid dairy, there are plenty of alternatives**

To read more about these issues, turn to our debate on page 13. But if you decide you *do* need to avoid dairy, what can you eat to ensure you get the missing nutrients?



## Could lactose intolerance be your problem?

Some people struggle with dairy because they don't produce enough of the enzyme that's needed to break down lactose, the sugar contained in milk. This condition is called lactose intolerance and symptoms include bloating, wind, abdominal pain and diarrhoea. Fortunately, it's possible to supplement with the lactose-digesting enzyme lactase, which should alleviate the unpleasant symptoms. Lactase is available in capsule form and should be taken before eating a meal that contains lactose.

### BENEFITS OF DAIRY

Dropping dairy from your diet could mean you're missing out on a whole host of valuable vitamins and minerals. After all, a glass of full-fat milk contains around 300mg of calcium – that's almost 40 per cent of an adult's recommended daily allowance.

In addition, dairy produce is a good source of protein, and contains vitamin A, important for healthy skin and keeping infections at bay. It's also rich in folic acid, which is critical in pregnancy for a baby's development; and potassium, important for cell, muscle and nerve function. It contains small amounts of iron, magnesium, zinc and selenium too.

But while dairy is certainly nutritious, it's easy to get the same nutrients from other sources. In fact, eating plenty of fresh vegetables, fruit, fish and nuts will provide you with a wider range of nutrients.

To boost your intake of calcium, opt for green leafy vegetables and fish – particularly oily varieties such as salmon, trout, mackerel and sardines. Prunes, parsley, pumpkin seeds and nuts are calcium-rich too. Fish and nuts also provide plenty of protein, as do eggs, meat and soya products, such as tofu.

If you feel you're missing out on vitamin A, orange foods are the answer. Try sweet potatoes, squash, carrots, dried apricots or mango. Watercress, cabbage and broccoli are also good sources, even though they're not orange!

The proportion of folic acid in green veg and nuts is much higher than in dairy foods, so spinach, asparagus, broccoli, lettuce and cabbage, as well as peanuts, hazelnuts and sesame seeds will easily fill the gap left by milk.

Most fruits and vegetables contain potassium, so eating your five portions a day should provide more than enough. The other dairy minerals – iron, magnesium, selenium and zinc – can be found in these foods too. If you want to boost them further still, blackstrap molasses is packed with minerals and can be used to sweeten food. It's delicious if stirred into cereals or desserts.

### DAIRY SUBSTITUTES

The dairy alternatives market is growing. Sales of soya milk, for example, have increased by a fifth every year since the 1990s. What's more, the variety of these foods is getting bigger all the time.

Soya milk is the most popular cow's milk alternative. It's a reasonable source of protein, contains some vitamin A, potassium and selenium, and while it has less calcium than animal milks, most brands offer a calcium-fortified variety. It can be used in exactly the same way as cow's milk, but watch for curdling when heating or adding to hot drinks (heat slowly or add to your cuppa before the hot water).



If soya milk is not to your taste, you can also get rice milk and oat milk. Both are enriched with calcium and other nutrients to provide a similar profile to ordinary milk. Or you can make your own creamy almond milk by blending one part almonds to four parts water (for best results, soak the almonds overnight so they blend more easily and sieve before serving). Almonds are naturally rich in protein and calcium.

Soya yogurts, cheeses and ice creams are all now widely available, but their similarity to dairy originals varies from brand to brand, so experiment to discover one you like. Dairy-free spreads are harder to find, as many margarines contain lactose (milk sugar) or casein (milk protein), but persevere and you'll find one you like.

### WHAT IF MY CHILD CAN'T DRINK MILK?

Almost one in 10 babies and young children now has an allergy to cow's milk. This can often cause panic in parents, who feel their children will miss out on essential nourishment while they are growing. But rest assured, there are other equally good child-friendly sources of the nutrients that milk provides. Some children can tolerate other types of milk. Goat's milk is one

of the most common alternatives and can be bought freeze-dried in tubs of formula suitable for infants and young children. There are also soya milks formulated for babies and children, but soya can be as allergenic as cow's milk so, if you try this, monitor your child for any adverse symptoms which may include skin rashes, digestive problems or catarrh.

Away from milk, there are plenty of other foods you can give your child that will provide the essential calcium and other nutrients. In the first stage of weaning, from six to nine months, try purées of green vegetables and foods such as creamed oats sweetened with blackstrap molasses. Fish is a great source of protein and calcium. Tinned varieties such as wild salmon and sardines also contain soft bones, which can be puréed with the fish to provide a superior additional source of bone-building nutrients (but always check the purée is smooth, to avoid choking).

Once a child is over 12 months old, you can slowly introduce other foods such as tahini – a sesame seed paste, which can be spread on toast or added to sauces – and nut butters such as almond and peanut. However, be careful about introducing nuts and seeds into your child's diet, as they can cause allergic reactions.

So if you do decide dairy's not for you – or your children – don't despair. There are plenty of extremely tasty ways to get the nutrients elsewhere. [healthy](#)

### THE CALCIUM CONTENT OF FOODS

PER 100G/100ML	CALCIUM CONTENT (MG)
Cheddar cheese	720
Tahini (sesame seed paste)	680
Sardines (canned in oil)	550
Almonds	240
Spring greens (raw)	210
Watercress	170
Brazil nuts	170
Tofu (enriched with calcium)	150
Blackstrap molasses (per tablespoon)	150
Whole milk	115

