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Nutrition

# Can't drink milk? There's an alternative dairy product for you

By Juliana Goodwin  
Gannett News Service  
Originally posted on November 27, 2007

When Tony Fronce of Springfield, Mo., heard goat's milk was easier to digest than cow's milk, he gave it a try because cow's milk sometimes bothered his stomach. That was eight years ago, and he's been drinking goat milk ever since.

At Mama Jean's Natural Food Market in Springfield, sales of alternative dairy products parallel sales of cow milk products, says employee Jim Nail.

"A lot of people are lactose-intolerant. Goat is easier on the stomach than cow. Soy satisfies their craving for milk, thick and creamy, but they don't have the reaction," Nail says.

These days there's an alternative form of dairy for just about everyone. Lactose-intolerant? Try soy milk. Soy allergy? Give rice milk a try. Need milk packed with protein? Sheep milk has almost double the amount of protein as cow milk. So how do you know what is best for your lifestyle? Here's a breakdown of benefits and downsides of different forms of dairy, including a few taste tips.

Soy and rice milk may appeal to vegetarians, vegans or people who are lactose-intolerant, says Terry Egan, nutrition and health education specialist with the University of Missouri extension.

"Soy and rice don't have lactose because they are from plant sources," Egan says. "Rice versus soy is more of a taste preference. If you don't like the taste of soy, you might try rice."

Soy is the closest nutritionally to cow's milk, Egan says.

One advantage of soy is it contains isoflavins, which help lower bad cholesterol, says Lisa Frazier, a registered dietitian at Skaggs Community Health Center in Branson, Mo.

Thanks to the isoflavins, soy is good for your heart. "They are) in all soy products," Frazier says.

Soy has virtually no saturated fat and is cholesterol-free, says Kathryn Fleming, dietitian with CoxHealth.

However, soy milk has twice as much fat as rice milk: 4 grams per cup versus 2 grams per cup.

Soy has about a third as many carbohydrates as rice milk — 8 grams versus 24.8 grams — according to information from www.calorie-count.com, an online resource that tracks nutritional information and grades foods.

Soy milk also has 7 grams of protein versus 0.4 grams in rice milk, according to the Web site.

Most people don't want or need to increase their fat intake, but those who do want a high-fat and high-protein drink — a bodybuilder, perhaps — will find it in sheep's milk.

"Sheep's milk is very rich. Whereas cow's milk has 8 grams of fat per cup, sheep has 17 grams," Frazier says. Sheep's milk also has more calories: 260 per cup, whereas cow's milk has 150, she says.

Sheep's milk has more protein than cow's milk — almost twice as much — and also has more calcium.

Sheep's milk is low in sodium, has no sugar and is high in phosphorus, riboflavin, calcium and vitamin B12 — but it is also high in saturated fat.

Cow's milk has an advantage for some people because it comes in reduced-fat versions and is an excellent source of protein and calcium, says Frazier.

"Lower-fat varieties are still high in calcium and vitamins, but lower in fat and calories," she says.

Most cow's milk is vitamin-D fortified, which may not be the case for sheep and goat milk, so be sure to read the label, Fleming says.

On the downside, a lot of people can't drink cow's milk because they have trouble digesting it.

"Technically, someone who is lactose-intolerant shouldn't be able to (digest goat milk), but I can tell you from working with clients some people who can't tolerate cow's milk can tolerate goat's milk. Goat's milk has a different fatty-acid profile," Fleming says.



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Options abound for those seeking an alternative to the more popular cow's milk. From soy milk to goat's milk, the alternatives can satisfy any palate and digestive system.

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Goat's milk and whole milk from a cow are similar when it comes to calories, although lower-fat varieties of cow's milk are lower in calories, says Egan.

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Goat's milk is higher in fat than cow milk, with about 10 grams per cup.

Goat's milk may have health benefits: A study from University of Granada in Spain implied goat's milk could prevent anemia and demineralization (softening of the bones) better than cow's milk. The study was conducted on rats; further study on humans would be needed to conclude if people would share the same benefits. If they do, goat's milk could potentially benefit osteoporosis patients or people with anemia, Frazier says.

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