

Is goat milk healthier than cow milk?



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The consumption of goat's milk among humans is nothing new. For centuries, it has been the milk of choice for populations around the world.

In the last few years, it has made a comeback in the Western world, with alternative health practitioners applauding its countless benefits to adults and infants.

Some even claim goat's milk may be the solution for those with milk allergies as well as infants.

But how much is true of the benefits goat milk supposedly has? Saudi Gazette found the answers to the most commonly heard allegations.

Goat milk is less fattening than cow milk

Goat and cow milk are quite similar when it comes to calories and fat. On average, a 100 ml serving of full fat cow milk contains 67 calories and 3.9 grams of fat, whereas the same amount of goat milk has about 60 calories and 3.5 grams of fat.

The semi-skimmed versions of both are similar as well. There is, thus, no evidence for the claim that goat milk is less fattening.

Goat milk is better digested than cow milk

However, goat milk devotees say that even if the amount of fat is similar, goat milk is better digested than cow milk.

One of the reasons is that the fat globules in goat milk are smaller than those in cows' milk, making it easier for the body's digestive system to break it down.

This may be true for infants and people with difficulties digesting cow milk. However, no studies have been carried out that prove goat milk decreases abdominal bloating.

Another reason is that goat's milk contains a higher amount of medium chain triglycerides (MCTs), which is believed to speed up metabolism and lower cholesterol.

Compared to 17 percent of total fat in cow's milk, goat's milk contains 35 percent MCTs, making it more similar to breast milk.

However, the link between weight loss, cholesterol levels and MCTs is not a strong one, and more research is needed.

In addition, the difference between the two types of milk is too small to have considerable impact on your waistline.

Goat milk is more nutritious

Both goat and cow milk are very nutritious drinks. However, it appears that goat milk contains slightly more vitamin A, and the vitamin is better absorbed by the body than the carotenoids found in cow milk, a precursor to vitamin A.

Researchers from the University of Granada in Spain also found that goat milk have higher levels of zinc and selenium, two minerals that boost the immune system.

Cow milk, on the other hand, contains 9 times more vitamin B12 than goat milk. This vitamin, which can only be obtained from animal sources, is important in the formation of red blood cells.

Children that were given goat milk were found to be vitamin B12 deficient according to the British Dietetic Association. Symptoms of B12 deficiency include fatigue and weakness.

Goat milk can help people with anemia

While the nutritional breakdown of goat's and cow's milk is similar, the researchers from the University of Granada did a remarkable finding back in 2007: Goat's milk was found to help with the digestive and metabolic utilization of minerals such as iron, calcium, phosphorus and magnesium.

In other words, goats' milk helps with the absorption of these minerals. They even found that rats with a condition of anemia or bone demineralization recovered when drinking goats' milk.

This could be an important finding for people suffering from these disorders, especially given that cow milk hinders the absorption of iron in the body.

However, studies in humans still need to be conducted in order to confirm the findings.

People with milk allergy or lactose intolerance can drink goat milk

Some natural health practitioners claim that people who are lactose intolerant are able to drink goat's milk.

It is true that goat milk is slightly lower in lactose (milk sugar) than cow milk, but it does contain lactose nevertheless.

This means if your body tolerates small amounts of lactose you can probably drink a bit more goats' milk than cow milk, just as you are likely to tolerate cheese better than milk.

If you, however, cannot have a drop of cow's milk without bringing your digestive system into trouble your body will not tolerate goats' milk either.

If you are allergic to milk, which is a different thing than having lactose intolerance, it is likely the casein protein in milk that causes your problem.

Milk allergy is very uncommon among people older than three, but it does exist and it is possible that a person with cow milk allergy is able to drink goat milk.

The opposite is also true: Someone with an allergy to goat milk may have no problems with cow milk. The only way to find out is by trying, but do so only if your allergy is not life-threatening.

Goat milk is better for infants

Lastly, manufacturers of infant goat milk formula often claim that goat milk is better for infants, as the chemical structure resembles breast milk more than cow milk.

Recently, the European Commission approved goat's milk formula for infants. This is good news, because, as said before, goat's milk boosts the immune system and is more easily digested.

However, it is important to note that breastfeeding remains the number one method to feed a child.

In addition, the British Food Standards Agency (FSA) recently warned that infants with cow milk allergy are "almost certainly" also allergic to goat milk.

Conclusion?

In some cases, especially among people with anemia or osteoporosis, goat milk may be a healthier choice, but there is no evidence that we should all shift to goat milk.

The much higher price tag seems not worth it. That is not to say that it harms to include other types of milk into your diet, including goat or plant-based milks.

After all, for a healthy diet variety is key. It is best, however, to consult a healthcare professional prior to making any dietary changes.