

## Replacing dairy milk with soy <sup>[1]</sup>

(1) Dear Alice,

Recently my family has completely replaced regular two percent milk with soymilk. Is this bad? Am I not getting the calcium and things I need from regular milk? Also, does replacing milk help with weight loss? I'm afraid I am not getting the nutrition I need!

— almost vegan

(2) Dear Alice,

What are the nutritional differences between soymilk and regular milk? What are the benefits, and is one better than the other?

— Udderly confused

### **Answer**

Dear Udderly confused and almost vegan,

Many people drink dairy milk (from a cow) as a healthy source of calcium and protein. In every eight-ounce cup of dairy milk, there are eight grams of protein and twelve grams of carbohydrates. It's also rich in other nutrients as well: one cup provides adults with about 30 percent of their daily calcium needs and about 50 percent of their vitamin B12 and riboflavin requirements. Despite these benefits, some people choose non-dairy milk, which includes soy milk, over the dairy kind due to allergies, intolerances, health reasons, beliefs, or personal preference. With that said, non-dairy drinkers need not worry — commercially-available dairy milk alternatives are commonly fortified with added nutrients that can provide almost the same dietary value as dairy milk!

As you might have guessed, soy milk is not technically "milk," but actually a beverage made from soybeans. It's comprised from the liquid that remains after soybeans are soaked, finely ground, and then strained. It has a creamy consistency and flavor similar to moo juice and as such, it's often switch-out for use with breakfast cereals, smoothies, and recipes that call for milk. And, since it doesn't contain any lactose (a sugar found in milk and dairy products), those who have a

lactose intolerance may find soy milk a tasty and suitable option. It's also a common dairy milk substitute for vegans and vegetarians, since it's plant-based and doesn't come from an animal.

Soy milk also provides additional nutrients including vitamins B1 and B3, fiber, and minerals needed for calcium absorption. Although research suggests that the calcium in soy milk may not be as readily absorbed into the body as calcium from dairy milk, it's often added to soy milk (and other non-dairy milks) in sufficient quantities to make its nutritional value comparable. Along those lines, almost vegan, soy milk also typically contains about the same amount of protein as dairy milk, has fewer calories than whole milk, and contains no cholesterol (which is great for heart health).

With this in mind, it's good to note that not all dairy milk and soy milk is fortified and not all brands use the same fortification formulas, so taking a look at the nutrition information label on the brand or variety you buy is recommended. If you're concerned about fat content, there are a number of low- or fat-free versions available. And, just like dairy milk, many of these non-dairy varieties also come in flavors, like vanilla and chocolate. These flavors may make your taste buds sing, but they also often indicate that the product contains added sugar (and, in turn, additional calories). If that's a concern of yours, keep your eye out for unsweetened versions. Also, though you both mention soy milk, some people have trouble digesting soy and could experience gastrointestinal discomfort after consuming soy milk, or other soy products. If that's the case for you, there are other non-dairy milk options to try out, such as rice, oat, almond, and coconut milk — you might also be able to find a blend! For some, these other non-dairy milks have a taste and mouth-feel that's preferable to or perhaps more tolerable than the soy variety.

All this to say, whether you're opting out on dairy for health reasons or due to personal beliefs, non-dairy milk is still compatible with a nutritious diet for most folks (although it's recommended that soy milk never be substituted for breast milk or infant formula). If you've milked this response for all it's worth and still have questions about your specific dietary needs, consider speaking with a registered dietician or certified nutritionist. Together, you can discuss how incorporating soy milk into your diet supports your health goals and lifestyle.

Hopefully, this moooves you in the yummiest and most nutritious direction!

Alice!

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