

Dairy

What are dairy products and what are the issues with them?

Dairy products include anything made from cow's milk including cream, butter, yoghurt and cheese. Milk powder is also included in a lot of cakes, biscuits, chocolate and processed foods. Modern nutritionists no longer see milk as a super food, and it is now known that excess milk intake can have some negative health impacts. Cows' milk is designed for baby cows, not people, and it is not an easy food for us to digest. It is often thought that it is high in both protein and calcium, but it can be unhealthy to consume excess protein, and the calcium in milk is very difficult for us to absorb. Many people find that dairy intake can contribute to sinusitis and other mucous conditions as well as allergies, particularly in young children. There is also a strong link between a diet high in animal protein such as dairy products and joint conditions like arthritis later in life.

We are not saying don't eat dairy products - just that moderation is good in all things and variety in your diet is great.

So what else can I eat or feed my child?

There are alternatives to cows' milk from either sheep or goats, as well as vegan alternatives based mostly on soy, rice and oats. Many people find goats' or sheep's milk much easier to digest than cows' milk, because it is closer in structure to human milk, and many children who are allergic to cow's milk can be successfully weaned on goat's milk. There are also now goats and sheep's milk cheeses and yoghurts that taste at least as good as those made from cow's milk.

For vegans, or those who cannot tolerate any dairy products, there is a range of soy-based products including spreads, milk, cream and yoghurts, and even vegan cheese alternatives. Non dairy protein options include those made from tofu, tempeh and seitan. The range and quality of milk and yoghurt alternatives has increased dramatically in the last few years to include nut and cereal milks, soy cream and mousses.

What about organic milk?

Organic milk is obviously still unsuitable for those with dairy intolerances, but it has several benefits over conventional products. As well as increasing animal welfare, organic milk will not contain antibiotic traces and it is now known to have a higher nutritional value. Recent research comparing organic and conventional milk has shown organic to be 50% higher in vitamin E, 75% higher in beta-carotene, which is converted to vitamin A, and considerably higher in omega 3 fatty acids, essential for brain function.