

What's up with plant-based milk?

Plant-based milks made from soy, rice, coconut, oats, nuts and seeds are popular alternatives to dairy milk and are becoming more readily available in grocery stores. But are they appropriate to offer in schools?

Why offer plant-based milk?

Children may avoid or limit dairy for a number of reasons. First, dairy continues to be a common food allergen among children in the United States. For those with severe allergic reactions, accidental consumption of dairy can be fatal.

Lactose intolerance, or an impaired ability to digest the lactose sugar found in dairy milk, is prevalent in many countries around the world and tends to be more noticeable as children get older. Though not fatal, symptoms of lactose intolerance after consuming dairy can be uncomfortable and distracting.

Providing plant-based milk in schools ensures there is a safe option for students with dairy allergies or lactose intolerance, and also includes those who choose to avoid dairy for non-medical reasons.

Nutrition in plant-based milks

- Plant-based milks made from soy and pea contain the most protein and are comparable to the protein content of dairy milk.
- Plants are naturally void of cholesterol. With the exception of coconut milk, most plant-based milks are low in saturated fat and are great heart-healthy beverage choices.
- While brands vary, most plant-based milks are fortified with calcium and vitamin D to provide consumers with the necessary nutrients for bone health.
- Many plant-based milks may also contain added B vitamins, magnesium, zinc and/or selenium.
- Like dairy milk, some varieties of plant-based milk may contain added sugar. Choose unsweetened plant-based milks whenever possible.

How are plant-based milks made?

Soy milk has been made for hundreds of years, and is a common beverage in many Asian cultures. Soy milk is created by soaking whole soybeans in water, then blending and straining the soaked beans and liquid to create milk. Similar processes are used to make almond, pea, rice, and other forms of plant-based milk.



A better option for the planet

Choosing plant-based milk can play a big role in protecting our environment.

Compared to milk from cows, plant-based milks require **less water and land** to produce, and **fewer greenhouse gases** are emitted in the process.

For example, one liter of dairy milk requires 8.95 square meters of land and 628 liters of water to produce, while the same amount of soy milk needs 0.66 square meters of land and less than 28 liters of water to produce. Soy milk also emits less than a third of the greenhouse gases compared to the dairy milk.

Source: Our World in Data



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