
Dairy and dairy alternatives

Summary

- Dairy (or a dairy alternative) is essential for your health and wellbeing.
 - Most people need two or three serves of dairy (or dairy alternative) every day.
 - Most Australians consume around only half the amount of dairy food their bodies need to be healthy.
 - There are lots of ways you can increase your dairy intake every day.
-

Dairy products (and dairy alternatives) are packed with calcium, protein and lots of other essential nutrients. Calcium is vital for healthy teeth and bones. It is also important for your muscles, heart and to help your body form blood clots. Protein is an important nutrient your body needs to grow and repair cells. But only around one in ten Australians meet the recommendations for dairy or dairy alternatives each day.

Why does your body need so much dairy food?

There are lots of essential nutrients in dairy. Each time you eat or drink dairy, you are giving your **body calcium**, iodine, vitamin A, vitamin D, riboflavin, vitamin B12 and zinc.

Calcium and vitamin D help your body build strong dense bones as you grow, and they keep your bones strong and healthy as you get older. Most adults need 1,000 milligrams of calcium every day. This increases to 1,300 milligrams for women aged over 50 and men aged over 70.

Not having enough calcium in your diet may increase your risk of **osteoporosis**. Osteoporosis is a disease of the bones, where they become brittle and weak and can break easily.

What if I don't eat dairy foods?

There are many reasons some people may not eat dairy foods.

Some people may be allergic to cow's milk protein – however this mostly affects infants and young children. The good news is that most children grow out of their cow's milk allergy by the time they turn four. If you think you or your child may have a cow's milk allergy, the best thing to do is contact your doctor. The Sydney Children's Hospitals Network has information on **milk allergy and a milk free diet**.

Other reasons people may choose to follow a dairy free diet include an intolerance to **lactose** (the natural sugar in milk) or because they are vegan.

But don't worry, because there are lots of dairy alternatives. Check out this list of dairy products and some easy alternatives you can use.

- milk – almond milk, coconut milk beverage (be careful not to confuse this with coconut milk that comes in cans, and check to make sure they are protein- and calcium-fortified) and calcium-fortified soy, rice and other cereal drinks
 - butter – dairy-free margarine, cooking or baking oils, fruit purees for baking, nutritional yeast for flavor, coconut butter
 - cheese – nutritional yeast, tofu
 - chocolate – dark or semi-sweet chocolate, dairy-free 'milk' chocolate, white chocolate or pure chocolate (that is, 100 per cent cocoa or cacao chocolate). Cacao is raw and less processed than cocoa. But they are both good for you, as long as you avoid added sugars, milk and oils
 - cream – there are **various ways you can substitute other items** such as coconut milk, milk alternatives, dairy free margarines, silken tofu, oils, nuts and seeds for cream.
 - yoghurt – buttermilk alternative, coconut cream, homemade dairy-free yoghurt, pureed silken tofu, sour cream alternative.
-

How much dairy (or dairy alternative) should you eat?

Most people need at least 2 or 3 serves of dairy foods (or dairy alternatives) every day. But this can change depending on your age, gender and health. The Australian Government's Eat for Health website provides information for **children, adolescents and toddlers** and **adults**. Older adults should aim for 4 serves of dairy or dairy alternative per day.

A standard serve of dairy is:

- 1 cup (250 millilitres) fresh, UHT long life, reconstituted powdered **milk** or buttermilk
- ½ cup (120 millilitres) evaporated milk
- 2 slices or 4 cubes (40 grams) hard cheese (such as cheddar)
- ½ cup (120 grams) ricotta cheese
- ¾ cup (200 grams) yoghurt

Try to choose low-fat dairy products most of the time. While full-fat dairy products have the same amount of calcium, they are also higher in kilojoules and saturated fat.

A standard serve of some common dairy substitutes includes:

- 1 cup (250 millilitres) soy, rice or other cereal drink (with at least 100 milligrams of added calcium per 100 millilitres)
- 100 grams almonds with the skin
- 60 grams sardines, canned in water
- ½ cup (100 grams) canned pink salmon with bones
- 100 grams firm tofu (check the label as calcium levels vary).

How can I boost my dairy (and dairy alternative) intake?

There are lots of easy ways to get more dairy (or a dairy alternative) into your diet.

Try these tips for including more dairy:

- Dollop some yoghurt on your breakfast cereal in the morning. Or spread ricotta on your toast and top it with fresh berries. Yum!
- Why not include yoghurt, cheese or almonds in your lunchbox to snack on during the day.
- Put a spoonful of Greek yoghurt on your curry just before serving (another tip – toasted flaked almonds will finish this dish perfectly!).
- Grated cheese make lots of things taste good. Try it on pasta, omelettes and vegetable dishes.
- There are lots of dairy dessert options but many are high in kilojoules, fat and added sugars (like ice-cream and dessert-style custards). It's hard to beat low sugar, low-fat yoghurt. It's yummy with fruit but just as tasty on its own.
- Enjoy a milky latte or cappuccino.
- Add ricotta or feta cheese to your salads.
- Enjoy a delicious smoothie by blending together your favourite fruits with yoghurt and milk.

Or you could use some dairy substitutes:

- Try almond milk with your muesli, or whizz it into a berry smoothie.
- Add a soy milk based béchamel sauce to create a dairy-free lasagna or moussaka.
- Experiment with cashew cream! It's a great savoury replacement for sour cream on tacos. Or enjoy it sweet with a bowl of your favourite fruit.
- Coconut cream and milk are versatile dairy substitutes. The key is to make sure they have added protein and calcium, so that they are nutritionally similar to dairy milk. Add them to your laksa, curry or mushroom sauce. And coconut rice is a dinner party hit! Just replace half your water with coconut milk and then cook as usual. It's a good one to try with kids too.
- You'll find lots of great soy-based yoghurts and ice creams in your supermarket. Try a few different brands to

find your favourite.

- Supermarkets also stock a good range of non-dairy cheese substitutes, such as tofu-based cheese-like products, including cream 'cheese', cheddar and pizza 'cheese'. Just use them as you would a dairy-based cheese.

How do I store dairy and dairy alternatives?

Most dairy products need to be refrigerated. The main exceptions are powdered milk products and UHT (ultra-high temperature) products, which you can store in the pantry. And, of course, ice cream, which needs to be kept in the freezer.

The best thing to do is follow the instructions on the product label. The best-before date gives you an idea of how long your dairy product will last before it starts to lose its quality (as long as you have stored it correctly). But it doesn't necessarily mean that after this date, the dairy product is dangerous to eat or drink.

The same thing goes for dairy alternatives. Follow the directions on the packet. Some non-dairy milks need to be kept in the fridge while others are fine in the pantry. And remember, even though non-dairy milk generally lasts longer than its dairy counterpart, it will still sour in time.

One last thing. If you find that your dairy products and dairy alternatives are spoiling before the best before date, check your refrigerator. It may not be cold enough.

Remember...

- Dairy (or a dairy alternative) is essential for your health and wellbeing.
- Most people need two or three serves of dairy (or dairy alternative) every day.
- Most Australians consume around only half the amount of dairy food their bodies need to be healthy.
- There are lots of ways you can increase your dairy intake every day.

This page has been produced in consultation with and approved by:

Dietitians Association of Australia

Content on this website is provided for information purposes only. Information about a therapy, service, product or treatment does not in any way endorse or support such therapy, service, product or treatment and is not intended to replace advice from your doctor or other registered health professional. The information and materials contained on this website are not intended to constitute a comprehensive guide concerning all aspects of the therapy, product or treatment described on the website. All users are urged to always seek advice from a registered health care professional for diagnosis and answers to their medical questions and to ascertain whether the particular therapy, service, product or treatment described on the website is suitable in their circumstances. The State of Victoria and the Department of Health & Human Services shall not bear any liability for reliance by any user on the materials contained on this website.

For the latest updates and more information, visit www.betterhealth.vic.gov.au

Copyright © 1999/2020 State of Victoria. Reproduced from the Better Health Channel (www.betterhealth.vic.gov.au) at no cost with permission of the Victorian Minister for Health. Unauthorised reproduction and other uses comprised in the copyright are prohibited without permission.