

A GUIDE FOR CHOOSING PLANT-BASED MILK



These days, whether you're taking a trip down the dairy aisle or to your local coffee shop, you're faced with more milk options than ever before. Plant-based milks such as soy, almond, coconut, and oat are now standard options alongside traditional cow's milk. If you're feeling overwhelmed by the number of choices, we've got you covered with this helpful guide for choosing plant-based milk.

While there are a variety of plant-based milks to choose from, not all offer the same nutrition. Here's how the most common plant-based milks compare to one another and to cow's milk to help you make the best choice for your eating style and nutrient needs.

NUTRITIONAL COMPARISON OF THE MOST COMMON PLANT-BASED MILKS AND COW'S MILK *



COW MILK
REDUCED FAT, 2%



SOY MILK



OAT MILK



RICE MILK



PEA MILK



COCONUT MILK



ALMOND MILK

	COW MILK REDUCED FAT, 2%	SOY MILK	OAT MILK	RICE MILK	PEA MILK	COCONUT MILK	ALMOND MILK
Calories	120	80	120	110	70	45	40
Total Fat (g)	5	4	5	2	4	4	3
Saturated Fat (g)	3	0.5	0.5	0	0.5	3.5	0
Unsaturated Fat (g)	1	3.5	4.5	2	3.5	0.5	2
Total Carbohydrate (g)	12	4	16	22	0	2	3
Dietary Fiber (g)	0	1	2	<1	<1	<1	<1
Protein (g)	8	7	3	<1	8	0	1
Vitamin D (% DV)	15%	15%	20%	10%	25%	10%	10%
Calcium (% DV)	25%	20%	25%	20%	35%	10%	35%
Potassium (% DV)	8%	6%	8%	0%	10%	0%	4%

*Nutrition data is based on a 1 cup (240 mL) serving and unsweetened, plain versions of plant-based milks



OVERALL NUTRITION PROFILE: SOY MILK

Soy milk is the most comparable to cow's milk in terms of nutrient profile and protein quality. As such, soy milk is the only plant-based milk recommended by the Dietary Guidelines for Americans to help meet nutrient needs from dairy. Dairy foods provide calcium, potassium, vitamin D, and protein which are vital for overall health and maintenance of the body.



PROTEIN: SOY AND PEA MILK

Soy and pea milk have a similar level of protein as cow's milk. However, among plant-based milks, only soy milk offers protein that is comparable in quality to animal-based protein. Soy's protein quality is on-par with cow's milk, eggs, and meat because it provides all nine essential amino acids in the amounts needed by the body. Soy milk has 7-8 grams of protein per serving (depending on the brand) and pea milk has 8 grams per serving.



LOWER CALORIE: ALMOND AND COCONUT MILK

Unsweetened almond and coconut milk typically have a lower number of calories per serving (40-45 calories) compared to other plant-based milks. Unsweetened soy and pea milk are good options, too, coming in under 100 calories per serving.



LOWER CARBOHYDRATE: SOY, PEA, COCONUT, AND ALMOND MILK

Unsweetened soy, pea, coconut, and almond milk are lower in total carbohydrates per serving (less than 5 grams) compared to oat and rice milk (16-22 grams, respectively) as well as cow's milk (12 grams). While oat, rice, and cow's milk are higher in carbohydrates compared to these other plant milks, the carbohydrates are naturally occurring, unless you are buying sweetened milk.



NUTRIENTS OF CONCERN: SOY, OAT, PEA, AND ALMOND MILK

Most plant-based milks are fortified with some level of nutrients including calcium, potassium, and vitamin D which are classified as 'nutrients of concern'. These are nutrients that most of the U.S. population doesn't get enough of. Soy milk can be used to help meet these nutrient needs. In general, oat, pea, and almond milks are also fortified with these nutrients but always check the nutrition facts panel to be sure. Calcium and vitamin D are important for bone health. Potassium is required for normal cell function and helps with maintaining healthy blood pressure.

1. U.S. Department of Agriculture, Agricultural Research Service. FoodData Central (2023). Available at: fdc.nal.usda.gov

2. <https://www.myplate.gov/eat-healthy/dairy>

3. Hughes GJ, Ryan DJ, Mukherjee R, Schasteen CS. "Protein Digestibility-Corrected Amino Acid Scores (PDCAAS) for Soy Protein Isolates and Concentrate: Criteria for Evaluation." *Journal of Agriculture and Food Chemistry*. 2011 December 14;59(23):12707-12. <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/22017752>.