



MILK IT FOR ALL IT'S WORTH

Milk and milk alternatives are an important part of a balanced diet.

While providing many essential nutrients including calcium, vitamins D, A, and B₁₂, magnesium, potassium, and phosphorus, milk and many alternatives to milk are also sources of protein and fluid. Essential for healthy bones and teeth, some of the nutrients milk products provide may also reduce the risk of some cancers, multiple sclerosis, osteoporosis, and respiratory tract infections. Despite these benefits, however, most of us do not come close to meeting the minimum recommendation for milk and alternative servings. According to the Canadian Community Health Survey (CCHS) (2006), Canadians of all ages do not consume enough milk and alternatives. More than one-third of Canadian children aged 4-9 years, 61% of teen boys and 83% of teen girls (aged 10 to 16), and 65 to 84% of adults (31 years and over) do not get the minimum recommended number of milk and alternative servings each day.

So why aren't Canadians Getting Enough?

Choosing not to have products containing milk may be a personal or medical choice. For example, vegans or ovo-vegetarians avoid milk products, often because of the harm brought to the animal; some may have an intolerance or allergy to milk, and others may just not like the taste. If you're one of the many Canadians not getting enough milk and alternatives, the information below describes what you could be missing, and how to reap the nutritional benefits of this important food group. Fluid milk is one of the best food sources of both calcium and vitamin D. All cow's milk in Canada is fortified with Vitamin D, an essential vitamin that our bodies also produce from exposure to the sun. Because of our northern latitude, Canadians in general don't get enough vitamin D, making getting enough milk even more important. Other dairy products like hard cheeses (e.g., cheddar, edam, swiss), and yogurt are also good alternatives to milk, provided they are made with vitamin D fortified milk. This should be indicated on the package label. Fluid milk alternatives such as *enriched* soy, almond, coconut, rice beverages, or blends (e.g., almond-coconut blend) are excellent sources of calcium and vitamin D, as both nutrients (among others) are added to make them equivalent to fluid milk. Consuming an adequate amount of these alternatives is important if you aren't consuming enough dairy products. Keep in mind that there is no perfect match to fluid milk. If you're not



getting enough fluid milk, consider ways in which your intake can be increased or choose the right kind and amount of milk alternatives.

Almond, Cashew, Coconut, Rice, or Soy Beverage:

Of these “milks”, soy beverage is actually the only true alternative to milk. Most of the beverages listed above don’t measure up when it comes to protein. Fluid milk provides nine grams of protein per cup, while soy provides seven grams. Almond and rice beverage, on the other hand, are low in protein, providing only one gram or less per cup. If you choose to use any of these alternatives, make sure that the beverage you choose is enriched, making it equivalent to milk when it comes to calcium and vitamin D. Some also contain added sugar, so choose the unsweetened versions more often.

Tip: Read the Nutrition Facts table on the label to ensure that, per cup (250ml), you are getting at least 30% of the Daily Value (%DV) for calcium and 45% for vitamin D.

Cheese:

Fifty grams of hard cheese like cheddar, edam, swiss, mozzarella, gouda, and gruyere, have the same amount of calcium and protein as a serving of fluid milk (250 mL), but not vitamin D. Soft cheeses like feta, camembert, brie, and goat have less calcium and protein, and processed cheese like cheese slices and spreads are very low in all three nutrients.

Tip: Use lower fat versions (i.e., 20% M.F. or less) hard cheeses more often. Try sprinkling them on casseroles, soup, or salads.

Yogurt:

Three quarters of a cup of plain yogurt will give you an alternative to fluid milk for protein, but has less calcium and vitamin D. Greek yogurt has double the protein of milk, but is still lower in calcium and vitamin D. Additional flavour to any yogurt means added sugar and/or artificial sweeteners. Drinkable yogurts have less overall nutrition.

Tip: Choose plain yogurt (i.e., regular or greek) and sweeten naturally with fresh or frozen fruit.

Kefir:



This fermented drink is usually made by adding yeast cultures and lactic acid bacteria to cow's or goat's milk. The lactic acid bacteria turn lactose into lactic acid, giving kefir its sour taste, similar to yogurt. Kefir has many health benefits as it is high in various strains of probiotic bacteria, many of which are thought to promote good gut health and immunity. A serving (i.e., 175 grams or $\frac{3}{4}$ cup) of kefir is a milk alternative according to Canada's Food Guide.

Tip: For a probiotic boost, add kefir to smoothies, cereal, or parfaits.

Milk and alternatives provide us with important key nutrients such as calcium, vitamin D, protein, and other vitamins and minerals. If you don't drink milk, choose a variety of calcium and vitamin D fortified alternatives, or talk to your health care provider about an appropriate calcium and vitamin D supplement.

Key References:

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