

Plant-Based Beverages for Children

What was once a simple choice between 3.25% (homogenized), 2%, 1%, or skim milk now includes flavoured milks, soy beverages, and other plant-based beverages.

Plant-based beverages are made from plant foods such as soy, rice, almond, coconut, oat, potato, and hemp. They look like milk and are often called “milks” but may not have the same nutrition as cow’s milk.

Families might choose to drink plant-based beverages because of allergies, lactose intolerance, vegetarian diets, or taste.

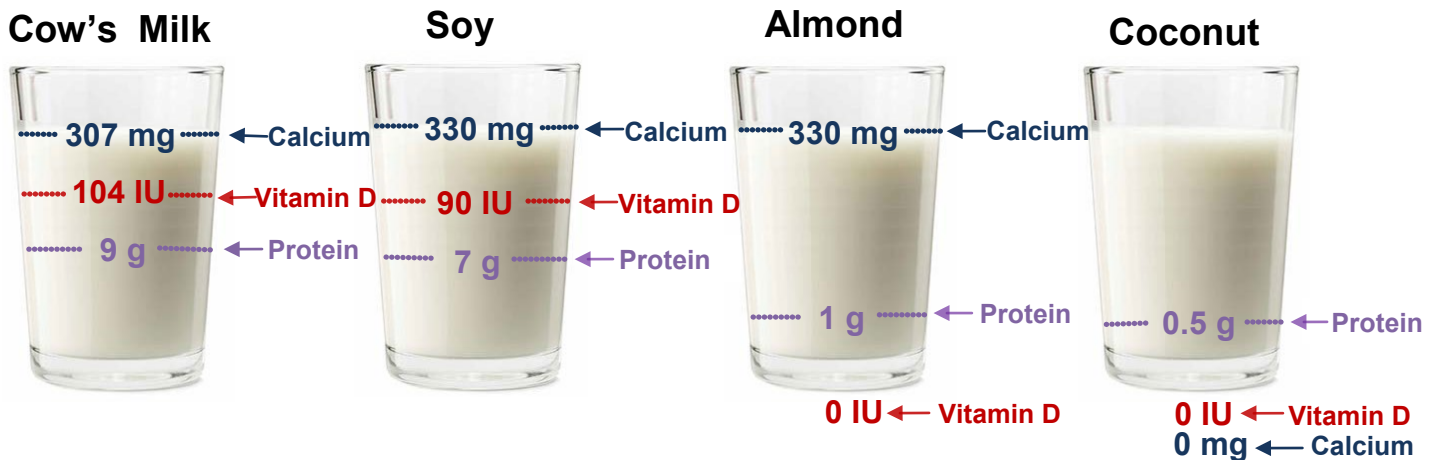
Whatever the reason, it is important to compare the nutrients, such as calcium, vitamin D, and protein, in these drinks to help you make a healthy choice for your child.



What’s in your cup?

Plant-based beverages are often lower in protein and energy than cow’s milk. They may also be lower in important nutrients like calcium and vitamin D, especially if homemade. The pictures below compare the nutrients that may be found in store bought plant-based beverages.


Compare the nutrients in 1 cup (250 mL):



Read the Nutrition Facts table on each beverage package. Some beverages are fortified (have nutrients added) and some aren't. The nutrients in plant-based beverages can vary.

Choose carefully

Plant-based beverages **aren't recommended** for children under age 2 because they can be low in important nutrients like fat, protein, and calories. **If offering a plant-based beverage instead of cow's milk to a child age 2 and older, choose a product that:**



Is labelled as **fortified or enriched**

Nutrition Facts	
Per 1 cup (250 mL)	
Amount	% Daily Value
Calories 70	
Fat 2.5 g	4 %
Saturated 0.8 g + Trans 0 g	4 %
Cholesterol 0 mg	
Sodium 90 mg	4 %
Carbohydrate 5 g	2 %
Fibre 2 g	8 %
Sugars 1 g	
Protein 7 g	
Vitamin A 10 %	Vitamin C 4 %
Calcium 30 %	Iron 6 %
Vitamin D 45 %	

Provides **less than 10 g** of sugar per 1 cup (250 mL)

Provides **at least 6 g** of protein per 1 cup (250 mL)

Provides **at least 30% Daily Value** of calcium and vitamin D per 1 cup (250 mL)

What does it mean if a drink is fortified or enriched?

Fortified or *enriched* on the label tells you that nutrients have been added. For example, a drink may contain added calcium and vitamin D.

What type and how much milk are recommended?

For children under age 2

Plant-based beverages **shouldn't replace breastmilk, 3.25% (homogenized) milk, or formula** in the first 2 years of life. These beverages don't contain enough protein, healthy fat, and energy to help children grow and develop. Some plant-based beverages can also be high in certain minerals that can be harmful if a child drinks too much.

Breastmilk is the only food a baby needs in the first 6 months of life. Breastfeeding until baby's 2 years old and beyond is encouraged. Breastfed babies don't need other milks. Let your baby feed as long and as often as she wants.



If baby is partially breastfed or not breastfed, offer a store-bought infant formula with iron until 9–12 months old. If your baby needs soy formula, use a soy formula until she's 2 years old. Start offering a follow-up (stage 2) soy formula when your baby is 1 year old.

3.25% cow's or fortified whole goat's milk can be offered at 9–12 months old, once your baby is eating iron-rich foods (baby cereal with iron, meat, and meat alternatives like beans, lentils or eggs) at most meals. By the time your baby is 1 year old, she should be drinking 2 cups (500 mL) of milk a day.




If you offer whole goat's milk, choose one that is fortified with vitamin D.

For children age 2 and older

[Canada's Food Guide](#) recommends **lower fat milk or fortified soy beverage** for children age 2 and older. Fortified soy beverages have similar nutrition to 2% cow's milk. Other plant-based beverages may not have the same nutrition.

If your child drinks a plant-based beverage other than soy, offer a variety of lean meats, fish, beans, lentils, eggs, tofu, and nuts to help her get enough protein.

Type of milk	Age	How much?
 Lower fat milk or fortified soy beverage	2–8 years	2 cups (500 mL)
	9–18 years	At least 2 cups (500 mL)

Facts about cow's milk

Milk provides calcium, vitamin D, phosphorus, protein, and other nutrients. These nutrients help build a child's bones and teeth, support healthy growth, and give them energy to play.

Milk sold in Canada must be pasteurized and meet standards to make sure that it's safe and healthy.

Hormones to increase milk production in cows aren't allowed to be sold or used in Canada. If a cow is sick and needs medicine, like antibiotics, the milk she makes while she's sick must be thrown away.

What if my child has a milk allergy?

If your child has a milk allergy, check with your child's doctor or a dietitian. The type of beverage or formula your child should drink will depend on her age and the type of milk allergy she has.

What if my child eats a vegetarian diet?

A vegetarian diet can be healthy for people of all ages, including babies and children. If your child isn't drinking milk, it's important to plan well to make sure she's getting all the nutrients she needs. Talk to a dietitian or doctor for more information on healthy vegetarian eating.



For more information

If you have questions about your child's nutrition, it may help to speak with a dietitian. Ask your healthcare provider for more information.

For health advice and information 24 hours a day, seven days a week, call Health Link at 8-1-1.

For nutrition information, visit the websites below:

- www.healthyeatingstartshere.ca
- www.healthyparentshealthychildren.ca
- Canada's Food Guide:
www.healthcanada.gc.ca/foodguide

Contact your local health centre to learn about other places to go for help in your community.