

# HEALTHY DRINKS. HEALTHY KIDS.

## Healthy Beverage Consumption in Early Childhood

Recommendations from Key National Health  
and Nutrition Organizations

### plant-based, non-dairy milks

#### Healthy Drinks, Healthy Kids

Research shows that what children drink – from birth through age 5 – can have a big impact on their health. That’s why some of the nation’s leading experts on health and nutrition developed recommendations to help parents and caregivers choose what’s best for kids. The full recommendations can be found at [HealthyDrinksHealthyKids.org](https://HealthyDrinksHealthyKids.org). This brief provides more details about *plant-based, non-dairy milks*.

### What are plant-based, non-dairy milks?

These are non-dairy, alternative milk beverages made from plant-based ingredients (such as rice, nuts/seeds [e.g., almond milk], coconut, oats, peas, or blends of these ingredients). Many plant-based milks come in both sweetened and unsweetened varieties; sweetened varieties usually have added sugars.

Plant milks are not nutritionally equivalent to dairy milk. Fortified soy milk is the only plant milk that is recognized as an acceptable substitute for dairy milk in federal nutrition programs, such as the Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children (WIC).

### What are the recommendations on plant-based, non-dairy milks?



### Why aren't these products recommended for young children?

Plant-based, non-dairy milks aren't recommended as a complete dairy milk replacement for young children as the nutrient content of these milks varies widely. With the exception of fortified soy milk, these milks are not adequate nutritional substitutes for dairy milk, which has many nutrients essential for healthy growth and development.

Some plant-based, non-dairy milks have added nutrients, such as calcium and vitamin D, but the amounts vary by type and brand, and evidence suggests that our bodies may not absorb nutrients from plant milks as well as it can from dairy milk.

Unsweetened and fortified non-dairy milks may be a good choice if your child is lactose intolerant or allergic to dairy milk, or if your family has chosen not to eat animal products. Be sure to consult with your pediatrician or a registered dietitian nutritionist to choose a milk substitute for your child and discuss how to make sure his or her overall diet has enough of the key nutrients found in milk, such as protein, calcium, and vitamin D.

To learn more about what experts recommend at different stages for kids five and under, visit [HealthyDrinksHealthyKids.org](https://HealthyDrinksHealthyKids.org).

Thirsty for more? Visit [HealthyDrinksHealthyKids.org](https://HealthyDrinksHealthyKids.org)

### **Aren't plant-based, non-dairy milks just as good if they're supplemented with the nutrients found in dairy milk?**

Some plant milks have added nutrients, such as calcium and vitamin D, but the amounts vary by type and brand, and our bodies may not absorb the nutrients from plant milk as well as they can from dairy milk.

### **Is it okay to give my child plant-based, non-dairy milk occasionally, in addition to dairy milk?**

Plant-based milk – whether it's made from nuts, oats, rice, or another plant food – is not a nutritionally equivalent substitute for cow's milk. With the exception of fortified soy milk, plant-based milks are nutritionally different from dairy milk, and many varieties have added sugars.

Children younger than one year should avoid consuming these beverages as they often displace the important vitamins and minerals in breast milk or infant formula. For children ages one to five, plant-based milks may be useful for those with allergies or intolerances to cow's milk, but the choice of milk substitute should be made in consultation with a pediatrician or registered dietitian nutritionist to make sure that your child's diet provides the rest of the nutrients that growing bodies need.

#### *Did you know?*

- Increasing sales of plant milks in the United States in recent years shows that these products are becoming more popular.
- Cup for cup, plant-based non-dairy milks are more expensive than cow's milk.

### **Thirsty for more?**

**Visit [HealthyDrinksHealthyKids.org](https://HealthyDrinksHealthyKids.org) to find more information on other drinks such as:**

- Water
- Juice
- Milk
- Toddler Milk
- Sugar-Sweetened Beverages
- Low-Calorie Sweetened Beverages

**Healthy  
Eating  
Research**

*These recommendations were developed by experts at the Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics (AND), the American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP), the American Academy of Pediatric Dentistry (AAPD), and the American Heart Association (AHA) under the leadership of Healthy Eating Research (HER) with funding from the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation.*