

Little Cups, Big Benefits: A Parent's Guide to Milk Options

Key Nutrients Ages 1 - 5 Need from Milk

Milk plays a critical role in the diet of young children aged 1 to 5 years, providing essential nutrients necessary for growth, development, and overall health. The key nutrients found in milk include:

- **Calcium:** Supports strong bones and teeth development.
- **Vitamin D:** Works with calcium to enhance bone health and immune function.
- **Protein:** Essential for growth, tissue repair, and muscle development.
- **Fats:** Vital for brain development, energy, and the absorption of fat-soluble vitamins (A, D, E, and K).
- **Vitamin A:** Promotes eye health, immune function, and skin health.
- **B Vitamins (Riboflavin, B12):** Help convert food into energy and support the nervous system.
- **Phosphorus:** Works with calcium to build strong bones and teeth.
- **Potassium:** Maintains fluid balance and helps with muscle and nerve function

Snapshot of Milk Options and Their Nutritional Benefits

Below is a breakdown of various milk and milk alternatives, along with the nutrients they provide:



COW'S MILK

- **What It Is:** Milk produced by cows, the most common type of milk consumed globally.
- **Nutrients:** High in calcium, protein, phosphorus, potassium, vitamin B12, vitamin D (if fortified), and fat (whole milk).
- **Options:** Whole (full-fat), 2%, 1%, and skim (fat-free).
- **Notes:** Whole milk is recommended for ages 1-2 due to its fat content for brain development.



GOAT MILK

- **What It Is:** Milk from goats, often easier to digest for some children due to its protein structure.
- **Nutrients:** Comparable to cow's milk in calcium, protein, and vitamins A and B2. It naturally contains less lactose.
- **Notes:** Should be fortified with vitamin D to meet daily requirements.



PEA MILK

- **What It Is:** Plant-based milk made from yellow peas.
- **Nutrients:** High in protein (similar to cow's milk), calcium (if fortified), iron, and omega-3 fatty acids.
- **Notes:** A good option for children with allergies to dairy, nuts, and soy.



SOY MILK

- **What It Is:** Plant-based milk made from soybeans.
- **Nutrients:** High in protein, calcium (if fortified), vitamin D (if fortified), and potassium.
- **Notes:** Nutritionally closest to cow's milk and a suitable alternative for children with dairy allergies.



NUT MILKS (E.G., ALMOND, CASHEW)

- **What It Is:** Plant-based milk made from nuts, such as almonds or cashews.
- **Nutrients:** Typically low in protein but often fortified with calcium and vitamin D.
- **Notes:** Not a significant protein source but can complement a balanced diet.



FLAX MILK

- **What It Is:** Plant-based milk made from flaxseeds.
- **Nutrients:** Low in protein but a source of omega-3 fatty acids. Often fortified with calcium and vitamin D.
- **Notes:** Suitable for children with nut and soy allergies.



HEMP MILK

- **What It Is:** Plant-based milk made from hemp seeds.
- **Nutrients:** Contains omega-3 and omega-6 fatty acids, calcium (if fortified), and small amounts of protein.
- **Notes:** A hypoallergenic option suitable for children with multiple food allergies.



COCONUT MILK

- **What It Is:** Plant-based milk made from the flesh of coconuts.
- **Nutrients:** Low in protein and calcium but provides healthy fats.
- **Notes:** Best used in moderation and in combination with other sources of calcium and protein.



OAT MILK

- **What It Is:** Plant-based milk made from oats.
- **Nutrients:** Naturally higher in carbohydrates, often fortified with calcium and vitamin D. Low in protein.
- **Notes:** A creamy, dairy-free option, but not ideal as the sole source of protein.



RICE MILK

- **What It Is:** Plant-based milk made from rice.
- **Nutrients:** Very low in protein and fat but often fortified with calcium and vitamin D.
- **Notes:** Suitable for children with severe allergies; however, it lacks protein and fat.

Current Recommendations for Children Ages 1-5

The American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP) and other health organizations provide the following guidelines for milk and milk alternatives for children aged 1 to 5:

Ages 1-2 Years

- **Milk Type:** Whole cow's milk is recommended due to its higher fat content for brain development.
- **Daily Amount:** 16-24 ounces (2-3 cups) per day.
- **Alternatives:** If cow's milk is not an option, fortified soy milk is the preferred alternative due to its comparable nutrient profile.

Ages 2-5 Years

- **Milk Type:** Switch to low-fat (1%) or fat-free (skim) milk to limit saturated fat intake.
 - **Daily Amount:** 16-20 ounces (2-2.5 cups) per day.
 - **Alternatives:** Fortified soy milk remains the closest substitute. Other plant-based options (pea milk, nut milks, oat milk, etc.) can be included but should be fortified with calcium and vitamin D.
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Additional Notes

- **Calcium Intake:** Aim for 700 mg/day (1-3 years) and 1,000 mg/day (4-5 years) through milk, dairy products, or fortified alternatives.
 - **Vitamin D:** Ensure 600 IU/day, primarily through fortified milk or supplements.
 - **Protein:** Children require approximately 13-19 grams of protein daily, which can come from milk, dairy alternatives, and other food sources.
 - **Watch for Added Sugars:** Opt for unsweetened versions of plant-based milk to avoid excess sugar intake.
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Big Picture

Milk and milk alternatives play a crucial role in meeting the nutritional needs of children aged 1 - 5. Cow's milk remains the gold standard, but fortified soy milk and other options can meet nutrient requirements for children with allergies or dietary preferences. Parents should focus on providing a balance of protein, calcium, and vitamin D to support their child's healthy growth and development.



Healthy Chocolate Banana Milkshake

Ingredients:

- 1 cup almond milk (or any milk of your choice)
- 1 large ripe banana, peeled and frozen
- 2 tablespoons cocoa powder
- ½ teaspoon vanilla extract
- ½ cup ice (about 5 ice cubes)

Instructions:

1. **Blend the Ingredients:** In a blender, combine the almond milk, frozen banana, cocoa powder, vanilla extract, and ice cubes.
2. **Blend until Smooth:** Blend on high speed for about 30 seconds or until everything is fully combined and the milkshake is smooth and creamy.
3. **Taste and Adjust:** If you prefer a sweeter shake, you can add a little sweetener like honey, maple syrup, or a pinch of stevia. Blend again if you add any sweetener.
4. **Serve:** Pour the milkshake into a glass and enjoy immediately!

Optional Toppings: For an extra treat, you can top the milkshake with a sprinkle of cocoa powder, chocolate shavings, or a dollop of whipped cream.

This healthy chocolate banana milkshake is a perfect blend of creamy, sweet, and chocolaty goodness, packed with nutrients from the banana and milk!



Fruity Breakfast Milkshake

Ingredients:

- ¾ cup milk (skim, soy, or unsweetened almond milk)
- ½ cup sliced banana
- 1 cup frozen berries (such as strawberries, blueberries, or raspberries)
- 3 – 5 ice cubes

Instructions:

1. **Combine Ingredients:** In a blender, add the milk, sliced banana, frozen berries, and ice cubes.
2. **Blend Until Smooth:** Blend on high for 30-60 seconds until the mixture is smooth and creamy. If it's too thick, you can add a little more milk to reach your desired consistency.
3. **Taste and Adjust:** If you want a sweeter shake, you can add a small amount of honey, maple syrup, or a few drops of stevia.
4. **Serve:** Pour into a glass and enjoy your healthy, fruity breakfast!

Optional Toppings: You can top your milkshake with a few extra fresh berries, chia seeds, or a sprinkle of granola for added texture.

This nutrient-packed milkshake is a delicious and quick way to start your day with a burst of energy!