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High in fat and with a carbon footprint to match, cowâ€™s milk is neither the greenest or healthiest milk available. So what are the alternatives? Here are 10 of the best

from greenhouse gas emissions to antibiotics, the problems associated with cowâ€™s milk are legion. According to Tim Lang, Food Commissioner at the Sustainable Development Commission (SDC): 'The heavy footprint of the meat and dairy industry means it's right to prioritise exploring how, not just whether, over-consuming societies like the UK can reduce their meat and dairy consumption.' Then there are the health issues associated with the white stuff, which range from dairy intolerance through to high cholesterol. Loaded with calories and heavy on the saturated fat, cowâ€™s milk certainly isnâ€™t the diet conscious choice for putting in your cuppa. Milk does have some health benefits though â€“ calcium for example â€“ but that mineral aside, there are better choices that are both low in fat and good for the planet. Hereâ€™s our pick of the best alternatives to cow's milk.

Soya Milk

Packed with protein and fibre, benefits of soya milk include the presence of cancer-fighting isoflavones, minimal saturated fat and the absence of galactose, which means that it can replace breast milk for galactosaemic children. Itâ€™s also safe for the lactose intolerant and anyone with a milk allergy. Because it comes from plants, there are no animal welfare issues associated with it and the growing soya plants absorb rather emit carbon â€“ the direct opposite of dairy cows. There are some downsides though, chiefly that its sugar content can be high, particularly in the flavoured versions. Other issues include the increasing amount of land being used to farm it, which is leading to deforestation in some countries. However, its overall impact is still much less than that of cowâ€™s milk, particularly when you choose an organic version.

Almond Milk

Almond milk is good source of magnesium, which helps to break down food can help with the function of the parathyroid glands, thus helping improve the health of your bones. Itâ€™s also loaded with manganese, selenium and Vitamin E. Vitamin E is an antioxidant that protects the cell membranes. Selenium is good for our immune system; it helps in reproduction, and in the metabolism of thyroid. It also prevents cell damage and tissue damage. Almond milk is also a good source of unsaturated fat, protein, flavonoids and potassium, and has less sugar than soya milk. Like soya milk though, it has a smaller carbon footprint by virtue of being derived from a plant source rather than a methane producing animal one. However, it doesnâ€™t taste like cowâ€™s milk by a stretch of the imagination, so it takes some getting used to if youâ€™re looking for a true milk substitute. Itâ€™s also significantly more expensive as almonds, a hard-to-grow crop, are the main ingredient.

Rice Milk

Rice milk is the most hypoallergenic of all the milk substitutes and is extremely nutritious. Itâ€™s also the least fattening of all the milk alternatives with only one gram of unsaturated fat per cup. There are also plenty of heart healthy nutrients in rice milk. The unsaturated fat comes from rice bran oil, which can help lower your blood cholesterol. Niacin and vitamin B6 are also good for this while the high magnesium content helps to control your blood pressure. Iron and copper increases your red blood cell production, giving you better oxygenated blood and more vitality. On the downside, since

rice is highly starchy, so is rice milk. One cup of rice milk contains 33 grams of sugary carbohydrates, three to four times the amount in milk or soya milk. If you have diabetes, rice milk can cause a sudden sugar overload. It also has a very low protein count compared to cowâ€™s milk and soya, and the calcium content is also minimal, so choose the fortified product instead.

Goat Milk

Itâ€™s not to everyoneâ€™s taste and itâ€™s from an animal source, but goatâ€™s milk has much to rec as an alternative to cowâ€™s milk. Dan Buettner, the founder and author of The Blue Zones, reports that the people of Sardinia, one of four places in the world where people routinely live to be 100 years old or more, regularly drink goatâ€™s milk, and itâ€™s also reported to protect against Alzheimerâ€™s dis has 15 percent more calcium, and more vitamin A and D, potassium, copper and manganese than cowâ€™s milk. It is also a good source of phosphorous and riboflavin (vitamin B2). Goats are not treated with growth hormones either and they produce less methane than cows. Goatâ€™s milk does have less folic acid and vitamin B12 than cowâ€™s milk though, as well as a little less zinc. Some people are reluctant to try it, thinking it will taste â€˜goatyâ€™. Actually, it's similar to cow's milk although it can taste a bit tangier depending on the animalâ€™s diet. Goat's milk yogurt tends to taste very tangy.

Sheep Milk

Sheep are among the most useful of domesticated animals, producing a sustainable supply of milk, meat and wool. A hardy species, sheep thrive on hillsides unusable for agriculture, and, like goats, produce far less methane than cows. Their milk contains up to twice as many minerals (including calcium, phosphorous, zinc and the important B vitamins) as cow's milk. Like goat's milk, it has small fat globules that are easily digested and itâ€™s a rich source of iodine, which is useful for those with thyroid problems. Unfortunately, itâ€™s almost twice as fattening as whole cow's milk and has many more calories. Itâ€™s also unsuitable for the lactose intolerant and babies. Although it contains higher levels of butterfat, itâ€™s actually lower in saturated fat than other types of milk. Taste-wise, itâ€™s richer and creamier than cowâ€™s milk but without the faint tanginess of goatâ€™s milk.

Buffalo Milk

Buffalo milk might sound a bit gimmicky, but unlike the modern dairy cow, buffalo can thrive without the need for high levels of concentrated, hormone-infused feed. Grass, clover and hay make up the bulk of a buffaloâ€™s diet; with bone meal, fishmeal and genetically modified feed rarely making it into their troughs. In the case of organically raised buffalo, it never does. The seven percent fat content is similar to that of cowâ€™s milk, and the two milks share an almost indistinguishable nutritional profile. However, buffalo milk does have a lower cholesterol count and more protein, calcium, iron and phosphorous. The presence of higher levels of immunoglobulins, lactoferrin, lysozyme, lactoperoxidase make buffalo milk suitable for special dietary and health foods

Oat Milk

Like many plant milks, oat milk is cholesterol and lactose free, and also contains high levels of antioxidant vitamin E. It also contains folic acid, which is essential for most bodily functions and is needed to synthesise and repair DNA, produce healthy red blood cells and prevent anaemia. Thanks to its plant source, oat milk is usually tolerated by people with multiple allergies, and is also a good source of phytochemicals; naturally occurring chemicals in plants that help fight diseases such as cancer, heart disease and stroke. The main argument against oat milk is that it, like rice milk, is high in sugar and doesnâ€™t have the calcium and protein content of cowâ€™s milk. Since itâ€™s derived from a cereal crop, itâ€™s also no good for people who are allergic to gluten, and has a distinctive, oaty flavour, which doesnâ€™t appeal to everyone. Itâ€™s also fairly difficult to source and is usually only available in health food shops.

Hemp Milk

A good alternative for anyone with soya and nut allergies, hemp milk is also cholesterol and lactose

free, low in saturated fats and rich in healthy omega fatty acids. Itâ€™s also an excellent source of protein and tastes creamier and nuttier than soya milk or rice milk, and also tends to be a bit thicker than other plant-based milks. Like other plant milks though, it lacks calcium and isnâ€™t as widely available as soya, rice and goatâ€™s milk.

Cashew Nut Milk

According to the George Mateijan Foundation, a quarter of a cup of cashews supplies almost 38 percent of the recommended daily intake copper, which is involved in many important bodily functions such as developing bone and connective tissue, producing melanin, and iron absorbtion. Cashews are a great source of magnesium like calcium, magnesium is also extremely important in keeping our bones strong and healthy, and, compared to other nuts, cashews have a lower overall fat content. As with the other nut-based milks you can also make cashew milk at home

Coconut Milk

Coconut milk is a very creamy, dairy-free alternative for those who are lactose intolerant or allergic to animal milk. Those who subscribe to the low-carb lifestyle often prize coconut milk for itâ€™s minimal starch content. A vegan drink, it is also soya-free, gluten-free, cholesterol-free and nut-free while its fat content is considered to a â€˜good fatâ€™, easily metabolised by the body and quickly turned into energy rather than being stored as fat. Coconut milk is also rich in lauric acid, a substance also found in human milk, which researchers have shown have anti-viral and anti-bacterial properties. Unlike other nut or plant milks, the saturated fat content of coconut milk is significant at five grams per serving, so drink it in moderation. It can solidify and separate when refrigerated, depending on the brand, so if you like a cold glass of milk, itâ€™s an inconvenient choice since you have to stir it and let it warm up to room temperature in order to drink it. Some brands also have a strong flavour that can be a bit overpowering.

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The a diet composed of professionals of a nutrition and exercise. The original idea belongs to Natasha Messina - Nutritionist, Professor of Physical Education, Msc Nutrition & Exercise Harokopio Univ. Athens.

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