

# Avoiding cows' milk

Dietary advice for the growing years

**Nutrition & Dietetics Department**

**This leaflet tells you about how to give your child a diet free from cows' milk and foods containing cows' milk. It is aimed at parents and carers of babies and children. A cows' milk free diet suitable for adults is described in other leaflets available from the Department of Nutrition and Dietetics at the Royal Surrey County Hospital.**

This leaflet is produced by the Dietetic Department at the Royal Surrey County Hospital, NHS Foundation Trust. It is not a substitute for dietary advice given to a specific individual by a dietitian. If you need to see a dietitian, ask your GP or consultant for a referral.

Please note that the information in this leaflet was correct at time of writing. The ingredients of manufactured products can change.

## Why should my child follow a cows' milk free diet?

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Your child may have had a reaction to cows' milk, baby milk containing cows' milk or food containing cows' milk. Alternatively, your doctor may have suggested your child tries avoiding cows' milk and foods containing cows' milk for a set time to see if this improves their health. This is described as a diet trial.

## What foods contain cows' milk?

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- All types of cows' milk: whole milk, semi skimmed, 1% fat milk, skimmed milk, UHT and long life milk, channel island or jersey milk, evaporated or condensed milk, breakfast milk, lactose free milk
- Milk powder
- Yoghurt
- Fromage frais
- Crème Fraiche
- Cream
- Butter
- Cheese
- Dairy ice cream

Or foods containing any of the above.

### **The following ingredients also mean that cows' milk is present in the food:**

Milk solids, non-fat milk solids, skimmed milk powder, lactose, lactoglobulin, lactoalbumin, butter fat, butter milk, butter oil, ghee, casein, caseinate, hydrolysed casein, sodium caseinate, curd, whey, whey powder, hydrolysed whey, whey syrup, whey sugar. Food manufactured in the European Union is required by law to list cows' milk in the ingredients panel if it is an ingredient in the food product.

All food sold loose now needs to be labelled e.g. pick and mix sweets, food from salad bars and bakeries.

**Always check the ingredients label carefully before giving to your child. Check labels regularly as recipes do change.**

**Food served in restaurants, schools and hospitals does not need to be labelled but information on allergens including cow's milk, must be available on request.**

## **Remember!**

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Be very careful when preparing food for your child so they do not get their food or drinks contaminated with cows' milk. Small amounts of cows' milk given by accident can make some children unwell.

## **What about milk from goats and sheep?**

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Children who are sensitive to cows' milk are often sensitive to milk from other mammals such as sheep (ewes') and goats. Do not give your child the following:

- Goats' milk, goats' cheese, yoghurt made from goats' milk, and food or drink containing goats' milk
- Sheep (or ewes') milk, cheese or yoghurt made from sheeps' milk, food or drink containing sheeps' milk
- Mozzarella made from buffalo milk

## **What can my child have in place of cows' milk?**

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Cows' milk is an important source of nutrients so a milk substitute is needed for children on a cows' milk free diet. There are a variety of milks available to use in place of cows' milk. These include special baby milks available on prescription and milks that can be bought in the supermarket, pharmacy or health food shop. Your dietitian will recommend an appropriate milk substitute for your child.

## **Can I still breast feed my baby?**

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Yes. Breast milk is the best milk for most babies.

Breast feeding mothers may be asked to stop drinking cows' milk and eating foods containing cows' milk, as cows' milk protein has been shown to come through the mother into her milk. It is very important that breast feeding mothers eat a well balanced diet containing adequate nutrients, especially calcium. Your dietitian will advise you on this.

## **Tell me about the special baby milks available on prescription?**

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Specialist manufacturers have developed milks (often called infant formula) for babies who are not able to tolerate milks containing cows' milk. These are available on prescription and are ideal for toddlers and babies under two years of age. They contain recommended levels of calories, protein, vitamins and minerals to support growth. Your doctor or dietitian will recommend a suitable infant formula for your child.

## **What milk substitutes can I buy in the shops?**

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Soya milk, rice milk, oat milk , coconut milk, hemp milk and milk made from nuts can be bought in shops. They may be found in the long life section or in the chiller cabinet.

Children under the age of one year should have breast milk or infant formula as their main drink. Most of the milks you can buy are unsuitable as a main drink for children under the age of two as they do not contain enough calories and nutrients for growth. They can be used on cereal and in cooking. These milks do not naturally contain calcium. Organic varieties of these milks can not contain added calcium but most regular, non organic milk substitutes are enriched and contain the same amount of calcium as cow's milk. Always give your child a calcium enriched milk substitute.

## Milks based on soya

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For some children soya infant formula or ready to drink soya milk may be the best milk. Alpro soya 1+® is designed for children over a year and is the best soya milk for most children between the ages of one and two years. This milk has more calories, vitamins, iron and calcium than standard soya milk. This milk can be bought in the shops. It is not available on prescription. Standard calcium enriched soya milk is suitable for most children over two years.

Soya infant formula milk and ready to drink soya milk contains substances called phytoestrogens. There is some concern about the safety of phytoestrogens when given in large quantities to very young children. The UK government recommends that babies under six months should not be given soya milk or soya infant formula.

## Rice milk

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Recent reports have suggested the levels of naturally occurring arsenic in rice milk may be too high for preschool children. Rice milk is therefore not recommended as a main drink for children under 4 ½ years.

The table below shows which milks may be used as a main drink for children of different ages. Any of these milk substitutes can be used in small amounts to mix cereal, make sauces and custards and in cooking.

Your dietitian will recommend which of these milks are suitable for your child.

Age of child	Suitable milks
Under 6 months	Prescribable infant formula suitable for milk sensitivity (not soya)
6–12 months	Prescribable infant formula suitable for milk sensitivity, soya infant formula
12–24 months	Prescribable infant formula suitable for milk sensitivity, soya infant formula or Alpro Soya 1+
2–4.5 years	Oat, coconut, soya, hemp milk and nut milk drinks fortified with calcium
4.5 years+	Coconut, soya, hemp and rice milk drinks fortified with calcium

## **How do I start my child on a cows' milk free diet?**

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First check the food you have at home to see whether it is suitable for your child whilst they are on a cows' milk free diet.

Fresh meat, fish, eggs, potatoes, rice, vegetables and fruit do not contain cows' milk. Prepare meals from fresh ingredients to ensure that they do not contain cows' milk.

Once you feel more confident you could start introducing more ready made milk free foods. You may want to go shopping on your own when you have plenty of time to check food labels.

## **What about meals at school and nursery?**

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School meals free from cows' milk can be arranged from school catering services.

Nursery, infant and junior schools must always be told about children on special diets. Please arrange to talk to your child's teacher about your child's cows' milk free diet.

## **Will my child be getting all of the nutrients they need?**

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A cows' milk free diet can contain all the nutrients and energy a child needs to grow and develop normally.

Dairy products do provide children with significant amounts of fat and calories so care needs to be taken to make sure that children on cows' milk free diets obtain enough energy. Some children will need larger portions of meals or extra snacks when on a cows' milk free diet.

Calcium is an important mineral for the development of strong bones and teeth. Special infant formula milks contain calcium. Always choose milk substitutes that are enriched with calcium.

Your dietitian will assess your child's diet and advise you on how to make sure your child is getting all they need.

## **Will my child always have to avoid cows' milk?**

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Your child will need to avoid cow's milk until their symptoms of cows' milk sensitivity have gone or until their diet trial is complete.

Many children grow out of their cows' milk sensitivity. The time this takes varies but usually takes 6 months to 3 years. Your child's sensitivity may go away gradually. Often children are able to eat foods containing small amounts of baked or cooked cows' milk first. For example, they may be able to eat a biscuit containing cows' milk before they can eat a pot of yoghurt.

## **When should I try reintroducing cows' milk to my child's diet?**

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Your doctor will usually advise you about reintroducing cows' milk.

Some children will need to have a 'milk challenge' under medical supervision in hospital. Your doctor will advise you if this is the case for your child. Otherwise your dietitian will be able to advise you on reintroducing your child to cows' milk.



## Do you have any meal ideas?

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Here are two menus to give you ideas of what to give your child.

### Menu for pre-school children

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#### Breakfast

- Weetabix® with oat milk
- Glass of apple juice

#### Mid morning

- Raisins and a drink of water

#### Snack meal

- Baked beans (check for cows' milk) with toast fingers and milk free spread
- Banana
- Drink of squash

#### Mid afternoon

- Drink of oat milk and a biscuit (check for cows' milk)

#### Main meal

- Fish fingers (check for cows' milk) with chips and peas
- Fruit pot
- Drink of water

#### Bedtime

- Oat milk

## Menu for school children

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### Breakfast

- Toast with milk free margarine and marmalade
- Orange juice

### Break

- Drink of water and grapes

### Packed lunch

- Ham sandwich (check for milk), plain crisps, cereal bar (check for milk) and apple
- Carton of fruit juice

### After school

- Rice milk and banana homemade milkshake
- Milk free biscuit

### Main meal

- Spaghetti bolognese, garlic bread made from French bread, milk free spread and crushed garlic
- Chopped strawberries

### Evening

- Hot chocolate made from rice milk and cocoa

## **My child's menu**

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**Breakfast**

**Mid morning**

**Snack meal**

**Mid afternoon**

**Main meal**

**Evening**

## **Key reference sources**

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- Diagnostic Approach and Management of Cow's-Milk Protein Allergy in Infants and Children: ESPGHAN GI Committee Practical Guidelines. S.Koletzko et al. JPGN. Volume 55, Number 2, August 2012.
- Arsenic in rice milk: [www.food.gov.uk/multimedia/pdfs/fsis0209arsenicinrice](http://www.food.gov.uk/multimedia/pdfs/fsis0209arsenicinrice)
- Soya milk: Paediatric group of the British Dietetic Association Position Statement Use of infant formula based on soya protein for infants. October 2010.

## Contact details

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If you have any questions about the information in this leaflet please contact the Dietetic Department at the address below:

### **Royal Surrey County Hospital**

Nutrition & Dietetics Department

Egerton Road, Guildford, Surrey, GU2 7XX.

**Switchboard telephone:** 01483 571122 **ext** 4202

**Direct line:** 01483 464119

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**Email:** [rsch.dietitians@nhs.net](mailto:rsch.dietitians@nhs.net)

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## PALS and Advocacy contact details

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Contact details of independent advocacy services can be provided by our Patient Advice and Liaison Service (PALS) who are located on the right hand side as you enter the main reception area. PALS are also your first point of contact for health related issues, questions or concerns surrounding RSCH patient services.

**Telephone:** 01483 402757

**Email:** [rsc-tr.pals@nhs.net](mailto:rsc-tr.pals@nhs.net)

**Opening hours:** 9.00am–4.00pm, Monday to Friday

If you would like information documents in large print, on tape or in another language or form please contact PALS.

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