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Got dairy?

Lactose-intolerant? Just don't like the taste? There are more alternatives to cow milk than you may realize -- and all have benefits.

Juliana Goodwin
News-Leader

When Tony Fronce of Springfield heard goat's milk was easier to digest than cow's milk, he gave it a try because cow's milk sometimes bothered his stomach.

That was eight years ago, and he's been drinking goat milk ever since.



At Mama Jean's Natural Food Market in Springfield, sales of alternative dairy products parallel sales of cow milk products, says employee Jim Nail.

"A lot of people are lactose-intolerant. Goat is easier on the stomach than cow. Soy satisfies their craving for milk, thick and creamy, but they don't have the reaction," Nail says.

These days there's an alternative form of dairy for just about

everyone. Lactose intolerant? Try soy

milk. Soy allergy? Give rice milk a try. Need milk packed with protein? Sheep milk has almost double the amount of protein as cow milk. So how do you know what is best for your lifestyle? Here's a breakdown of benefits and downsides of different forms of dairy, including a few taste tips.

Soy and rice

Soy and rice milk may appeal to vegetarians, vegans or people who are lactose-intolerant, says Terry Egan, nutrition and health education specialist with the University of Missouri extension.

"Soy and rice don't have lactose because they are from plant sources," Egan says. "Rice versus soy is more of a taste preference. If you don't like the taste of soy, you might try rice."

Soy is the closest nutritionally to cow's milk, Egan says.

One advantage of soy is it contains isoflavins, which help lower bad cholesterol, says Lisa Frazier, a registered dietitian at Skaggs Community Health Center in Branson.

Thanks to the isoflavins, soy is good for your heart. "(They are) in all soy products," Frazier says.

Soy has virtually no saturated fat and is cholesterol-free, says Kathryn Fleming, dietitian with CoxHealth.

However, soy milk has twice as much fat as rice milk: 4 grams per cup versus 2 grams per cup.

Soy has about a third as many carbohydrates as rice milk — 8 grams versus 24.8 grams — according to information from www.calorie-count.com, an online resource that tracks nutritional information and grades foods.

Soy milk also has 7 grams of protein versus 0.4 grams in rice milk, according to the Web site.



Options abound for those seeking an alternative to the more popular cow's milk. From rice to sheep, milk alternatives can satisfy any palate and digestive system.

Steve J.P. Liang / News-Leader



Goat's milk is an alternative to using cow's milk.

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Nutrition information

One cup of:

- Rice milk has 120 calories, 2 grams of fat and 24.8 carbohydrates
- Silk Soymilk Plain has 100 calories, 4 grams of fat and 8 grams of carbohydrates
- 1 percent cow milk has 102 calories, 2.4 grams of fat and 12.2 grams of carbohydrates
- 2 percent cow milk has 122 calories, 4.8 grams of fat and 11.4 carbohydrates
- Goat milk has 168 calories, 10 grams of fat and 10.9 grams of carbohydrates
- Sheep milk has 265 calories, 17 grams of fat and 13 grams of carbohydrates

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Sheep, cow and goat

Most people don't want or need to increase their fat intake, but those who do want a high-fat and high-protein drink — a bodybuilder, perhaps — will find it in sheep's milk.

"Sheep's milk is very rich. Whereas cow's milk has 8 grams of fat per cup, sheep has 17 grams," Frazier says. Sheep's milk also has more calories: 260 per cup, whereas cow's milk has 150, she says.

Sheep's milk has more protein than cow's milk — almost twice as much — and also has more calcium.

Sheep's milk is low in sodium, has no sugar and is high in phosphorus, riboflavin, calcium and vitamin B12 — but it is also high in saturated fat.

Cow's milk has an advantage for some people because it comes in reduced-fat versions and is an excellent source of protein and calcium, says Frazier.

"Lower-fat varieties are still high in calcium and vitamins, but lower in fat and calories," she says.

Most cow's milk is vitamin-D fortified, which may not be the case for sheep and goat milk, so be sure to read the label, Fleming says.

On the downside, a lot of people can't drink cow's milk because they have trouble digesting it.

"Technically, someone who is lactose-intolerant shouldn't be able to (digest goat milk), but I can tell you from working with clients some people who can't tolerate cow's milk can tolerate goat's milk. Goat's milk has a different fatty-acid profile," Fleming says.

If your allergy to cow's milk is severe, it may not be worth trying goat's milk because you may have a similar reaction. If your reaction is a simple stomachache, then give goat's milk a try, Frazier suggests.

Goat's milk and whole milk from a cow are similar when it comes to calories, although lower-fat varieties of cow's milk are lower in calories, says Egan.

Goat's milk is higher in fat than cow milk, with about 10 grams per cup.

Goat's milk may have health benefits: A study from University of Granada in Spain implied goat's milk could prevent anemia and demineralization (softening of the bones) better than cow's milk. The study was conducted on rats; further study on humans would be needed to conclude if people would share the same benefits. If they do, goat's milk could potentially benefit osteoporosis patients or people with anemia, Frazier says.

Tasting new dairy products

One way to try some alternative dairy products is to taste various cheeses. While not all grocery stores offer milk from goats or sheep, most do stock a form of goat or sheep cheese.

Jana Daugherty, co-owner of The Cheddar Block on Republic Road, says the store carries 150 to 200 cheeses. About 20 percent to 30 percent of those are goat and sheep cheeses.

There are a variety of goat cheeses, both hard and soft, Daugherty says. In general, goat cheese tends to be "creamy with a tang to it," Daugherty says.

Chevre, which means goat in French, is goat cheese, says Terry Egan, nutrition and health education specialist with the University of Missouri extension.

Chevre is great spread on a cracker, suggested Daugherty. Alternatively, roll chevre in fresh or dried herbs and put it on bread.

You can also add goat cheese to scrambled eggs, use it to thicken a sauce, sprinkle on salad or add to a dish of pasta.

Most of the sheep cheeses Daugherty carries are hard cheeses, and what they taste like varies greatly. You can eat sheep cheese on a cracker, grate it to top a dish or substitute it for other cheeses, Daugherty says.

If you want to pair wine and cheese, obey the old adage of what grows together, goes together, suggested Belinda Chang, a sommelier and corporate director of wine and spirits for Cenitare Restaurants in Chicago. In other words, pick wine and cheeses from the same region. If you're serving a salad with slice of chevre, serve a crisp sauvignon blanc from Sancerre or Pouilly Fume (areas in France). If you don't want white, try a Sancerre rosé.

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Daugherty enjoys goat cheese with red wines.

Many Americans have sampled goat or sheep cheese if they have had feta cheese, which can be a mix of sheep and goat milk or just sheep milk, says Egan.

Feta is a Mediterranean staple, and Chang suggested turning to Italian wines to pair with this cheese. For a savory course, pair feta with Sicilian inzolia (an Italian white).

The big thing is just give it new products a try, Daugherty says: "A lot of people are really surprised when they try a sheep- or goat-milk cheese that they like it. I would encourage them to try things."

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