



## Milk: What to Offer and When

Milk is the most important food in the first year of a child's life.

It remains a very important food over the next few years of life, as well. Milk provides **protein** for growth and repair of body cells, and **fat** for energy and brain growth. There are many other important nutrients in milk like **calcium** and **Vitamin D**.

**Plant-based drinks** (almond, rice, coconut, hemp, potato, oat) are becoming more popular.

These don't have the right amount of nutrients for young children.

### Recommendations (0-2 years):

- Breastfeed exclusively for the first 6 months of life.
- Continue breastfeeding up to 2 years and beyond, adding complementary foods at 6 months.
- Choose iron-fortified infant formula if not breastfeeding.
- Wait until 9-12 months before offering whole cow's milk.
- If your child is not tolerating milk, speak to your doctor, nurse practitioner, public health nurse or a registered dietitian.
- Soy, rice or other plant-based drinks are not recommended in the first 2 years.

Offer **whole** or homogenized (3.25 %) milk to children until age 2. **After age 2**, lower fat milk (skim, 1%, 2%) can be given. **Fortified soy** or **fortified goat's** milk are the only milk alternatives that have similar nutrition to cow's milk. (Note: Always choose cow and goat milk that has been **pasteurized**).

### Recommendations (2-8 years):

**Children in this age group require 13-19 grams of protein daily.**

- Choose cow, goat, or soy milk. 2 cups of cow's milk contains 16 grams of protein. (2 cups of goat's milk contains 17 grams of protein, while 2 cups of fortified soy drink contains 13 grams of protein).
- Limit almond, coconut, rice and other plant-based drinks as they contain very little protein. They are also too low in fat to support brain growth. Drinking too much of these can fill up a child and cause them to eat less food.
- If you want to feed your infant/child plant-based drinks, speak with a registered dietitian to ensure nutrient needs are met.

References: <https://www.cps.ca/en/media/dietitians-pediatricians-advise-parents-to-exercise-caution-with-plant-base>

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For more information on healthy eating for young children:

- *Dial-a-Dietitian* 1-877-830-2892
- Breastmilk and Other Drinks for Babies: <https://vimeo.com/114495289>
- <http://www.gov.mb.ca/healthyliving/hlp/nutrition/children.html>