

One reason a client might want to replace cow's milk with a milk sourced from plants is that they are lactose intolerant. This condition exists when the body cannot fully digest the lactose, or sugar, that is in cow's milk. And it is a common issue.

According to the U.S. National Library of Medicine, roughly two in three adults aren't able to fully digest lactose. These rates are even higher for people of certain descents. So, if you have clients who are East Asian, West African, Arab, Jewish, Greek, or Italian, this may be a bigger issue for them.

When lactose intolerant people consume products that contain this sugar, they experience a variety of uncomfortable symptoms. Among them are nausea, diarrhea, bloating, gas, and cramps. Finding a lactose-free alternative enables them to keep dairy in their diet without causing their body distress.

Another reason people might want to switch to dairy alternatives is that they're allergic or sensitive to cow's milk. The Mayo Clinic reports that this is one of the most common food allergies for children. Though milk from cows is generally the cause, other dairy animal products may create the same effect. This includes dairy made from sheep and goats.

The Mayo Clinic adds that it is the casein and whey in cow's milk that typically causes these dairy allergies and sensitivities. In some cases, people are allergic or sensitive to only one of these proteins. Other times, they react to both.

If it is a sensitivity, removing these proteins can reduce their troubles with cramping, gas, and diarrhea. If it is an allergy, replacing cow's milk with plant-based alternatives may save their life by preventing an anaphylaxis response.

Your clients may also be interested in replacing dairy milk with a plant-based milk because they wish to follow a vegan diet. Research has found that there are many benefits associated with removing animal products from your diet. For instance, the protein that comes from animal meat is generally higher in saturated fat. By eliminating it then, you also lower your risk of diseases connected to animal fats. This includes diabetes, hypertension, and heart disease.

Some people choose a vegan diet because they disagree with how animals are treated when raised for food. To protest this, they remove animal food products from their diet completely. In cases such as this, plant-based dairy makes it possible to include this category of food without violating their beliefs

Plant-Based Dairy Products and Nutrition

The American Society for Nutrition set out to answer this question. To do it, they compared a number of milk alternatives to one cup of full-fat cow's milk. This included soy milk, almond milk, pea protein, coconut milk, and several others.

Here are some of their most notable findings. We've also included what these may mean for your clients when it comes to their individual health and wellness.

Calories

Many milk alternatives (almond milk, coconut milk, rice milk, etc.) contain fewer calories than cow's milk. That makes these options good for clients who are trying to reduce their calorie intake. Oat milk was the only exception as it contained more. So, this alternative may make more sense for clients who need to add more calories to their diet.

Fat

Most dairy-free milks contain anywhere from 25 to 63 percent less fat than cow's milk. Hemp was the only one that fell outside these guidelines. So, if you're trying to find ways for clients to reduce the amount of fat they consume, substituting cow's milk with a plant-based milk can help achieve this goal.

Sugar

A lot of milk alternatives contain less sugar than cow's milk. While all clients should be watching their sugar intake, this is even more critical for those diagnosed with diabetes. Consuming products higher in sugar can cause their blood sugar to spike, which Medical News Today shares can lead to shortness of breath, rapid heart rate, or even a coma.

Protein

Typically, dairy-free alternatives are lower in protein than milk that comes from cows. If clients wish to incorporate one of these options, additional protein may need to be added in their diet to ensure that they are getting enough of this macronutrient. The only exceptions were soybean, pea protein, and flaxseed milk.

Sodium

Coconut milk has the lowest amount of sodium. That makes this option more beneficial for clients who need to limit their intake. This would include those who struggle with high blood pressure, hypertension, or other cardiac issues.

Minerals

Certain minerals are more prevalent in some dairy alternatives than in others. For instance, pea protein milk is higher in potassium and calcium. If your client is deficient in one of these nutrients, switching to this milk can help them increase their intake.

Creating a Healthy Diet with Plant-Based Foods

Whether your client wants to consume plant-based dairy products due to their reaction to cow's milk or because they wish to protest the inhumane treatment of animals, there are a few things you can do as their trainer and coach to help them create a diet based on health.

For instance, if you find that they're not eating enough protein, you could suggest that they incorporate more plant-based protein options in their diet. This might include eating more nuts, increasing their intake of soy, or supplementing with a plant-based protein powder.

It's also important to stress that, even though many dairy alternatives are lower in sugar, this doesn't mean they get to consume more of them. One example of this is ice cream. While a bowl of this sweet treat now and then is okay, eating ice cream every single day will make it harder for them to meet their health and fitness goals.

At the same time, you also want to continue to provide tips to improve other bad eating habits they may have. Reinforce how eating slower helps the stomach better recognize when it is full, for example. Or talk about how eating at the kitchen table versus the couch keeps them from overeating because they will be less distracted.

It's also important to remember that each person is unique. So, one person may tolerate dairy milk alternatives better than another. To help you tailor your diet recommendations even more, the ISSA offers a DNA-Based Fitness Coach Certification. This course teaches you how to create an effective health and fitness program for clients based on their genetics. Enroll today and learn how to give your clients a plan suited uniquely to them.