

Dairy free diets for babies and children

Cows milk is often poorly tolerated by babies and children due to the protein it contains which is very dense and difficult to digest, as well as its lactose (milk sugar) content which can be a problem for children who lack sufficient amounts of a digestive enzyme called lactase.

Dairy products are implicated in a number of childhood ailments such as asthma, eczema, catarrh, glue ear and digestive problems such as colic and constipation.

Removing cows milk from your child's diet can result in a dramatic improvement to their health. It is important that your child really does avoid all cows milk as even the smallest amount may cause a flare-up of symptoms, so check food labels and ingredient lists for products such as skimmed milk, whey and lactose. Also make sure that when your child is visiting friends or at nursery or play group that people know not to give them dairy products.

If your baby is still being breastfed then you will also need to remove dairy products from your diet, as the protein in the cows milk can cross into your milk.

If your baby is being fed on a formula milk which is made with modified cows milk then you may either change to a goats milk or soya based formula milk, these alternative products will contain the correct amount of calcium and other nutrients that your baby requires.

If your baby is over twelve months then there is a variety of alternatives to choose from, Goats, soya, rice or oat milk, all of which should be available from your local supermarket or health food shop.

Most supermarkets will now stock a whole range of dairy free products such as soya based yoghurts, cheeses and spreads.

If you are removing dairy products from your child's diet then you must ensure your child is receiving an adequate supply of calcium from other food sources.

The recommended calcium intake for a small child is 350mg-450mg daily.

For calcium to be used effectively it needs to be in the right balance with magnesium.

Green leafy vegetables (spinach, kale, watercress, broccoli, cabbage, etc...) and nuts and seeds, which can be ground and mixed with your child's food, have absolutely the right balance of calcium to magnesium, ensuring the best uptake and utilization by the body.

Other good sources of calcium include dried seaweeds, fish (canned sardines, pilchards, salmon and mackerel), and beans (soya, haricot, kidney).

Dairy free recipes for babies and children

4-6 months

It is best to introduce foods one by one at the start of weaning and foods should be given as a semi-liquid puree with no lumps and no added salt or sugar. *Vegetables, fruits, grains and pulses* - remove skins, cook until tender and puree. Try sweet potato, carrot, parsnip, swede, broccoli, artichoke, green beans, apples, apricots, peaches, pears, mango, melon, brown rice, millet, red lentils and peas. Avocado and bananas can be given raw after your child has been on solids for approximately 1 month.

6-9 months

Continue to introduce new foods one by one, being aware of any reactions, *Meat, Pulses, Grains and Fats* - try oily fish, poultry, kidney beans, brown lentils, haricot beans, cannellini beans, mung beans, pinto beans, sprouted pulses and bean sprouts, buckwheat, and cold pressed oils such as flax, walnut and safflower,

9-12 months

Spinach and Chickpeas

Melt 1 tbsp of olive oil in a medium saucepan over medium heat. Add 1 small onion finely chopped, stir, then cook until it is translucent, about 5 mins. Add 1 tbsp mild curry-paste or 1 tsp curry powder, stir, then add 180g of cooked chickpeas, 180g frozen spinach and 125ml unsweetened coconut milk. Bring to the boil, reduce heat so the liquid is simmering and cook for 10 mins until liquid has reduced by about one-third. Remove from heat and serve. Puree if necessary.

12-15 months

Tofu bites

Place 4 tsp tamari, 1tsp water, 1tsp sake, 1 small garlic clove finely chopped, 1 small pinch of finely chopped fresh ginger, in a shallow bowl. Mix then add 125g tofu cut into 1.25cm squares. Mix again, cover and marinate for at least 1 hour or up to 8 hours. Heat 2 tsp vegetable oil in a non-stick frying pan over a medium heat until it is hot. Add the tofu and it's marinade, toss, then cook, stirring constantly, until the tofu cubes are golden and hot through, 4-5 mins. Remove from heat, drizzle with $\frac{1}{2}$ tsp of sesame oil to taste and serve.