



Complex Child E-Magazine

www.ComplexChild.com

Letting Your Dairy-Free Child Thrive

by Susan Agrawal

Allergies and intolerances to milk protein, along with lactose intolerance, are some of the most common food-related problems faced by young children and require dairy avoidance or lactose-free diets. Other children may also be placed on milk-free (casein-free) diets if they are on the autism spectrum or have other neuro-behavioral diagnoses. Many families decide that the best option is to remove all dairy products from their child's diet, and in some cases, from the diets of the entire family. While this diet may be difficult, many dairy substitutes are now available that allow children to continue eating their favorite foods. Your child can live dairy-free and still thrive!

The Dairy-Free Infant

Milk protein intolerance is very common in infants and usually improves with age. If you suspect your child is dairy-intolerant or your doctor has placed your child on a dairy-free diet, you will be pleased to find many options available.

If your child breastfeeds, you will need to be the one changing your diet. Eliminating all milk protein from your diet is the only way a breastfeeding child can be kept completely dairy-free.

Children who are formula-fed may first be tried on a soy formula. These are widely available, and almost every major formula manufacturer produces one. Some children who are milk protein intolerant are also soy protein intolerant. In this case, a better alternative may be a more hypoallergenic formula such as Alimentum or Nutramigen, though these do both contain hydrolyzed milk and are not suitable for children with severe allergies or intolerances. For children with severe allergies or those who want to completely avoid milk, alternatives include elemental formulas such as Neocate Infant, EleCare, or the new formula Nutramigen AA. For further information on formulas see this article [<http://www.articles.complexchild.com/June2008/00047.html>].

As infants begin taking solid foods, you need to be vigilant about labels. Many baby foods, including seemingly straightforward cans of fruit, may actually contain milk. Some dry baby cereals contain soy or dairy derivatives. Read labels and look for the words milk, whey, casein, caseinate, butter, or cream, all of which indicate milk. Recent food guidelines require manufacturers to list in simple terms whether or not items contain milk, but some products still have convoluted labels that need to be examined carefully.

The Dairy-Free Tube-Feeder

Children who are fed partially or fully by tube also have several options for staying dairy-free. Before their first birthdays, these children may simply take breastmilk or infant formula, as outlined above, through their tubes. After their first birthdays, a non-dairy pediatric formula should be chosen. Children with straightforward milk-intolerance may do well on a pediatric soy formula, such as Bright Beginnings Soy Pediatric. Children with more complex gastrointestinal issues or allergies may require an elemental formula such as Neocate Jr., E028 Splash, EleCare, or Vivonex Pediatric.

It is also possible to prepare a blended diet for your child using real foods and either formula or a beverage like soymilk, rice milk, or almond milk. You should always consult a dietitian to help you develop an appropriate recipe for your blended formula. A handbook for blended diets is also available through New Visions at <http://www.new-vis.com/cart/detail.php?Item=B-12-01>

The Dairy-Free Child

Children who eat orally require a little bit more guidance and finesse when it comes to maintaining a completely dairy-free diet. It is important to teach your child early on that he or she cannot have milk or milk products, and to ask if a new food contains milk before eating it. Many children as young as four years old may be able to learn to ask if something contains milk, though it is probably best not to rely on either their abilities or those of adults unfamiliar with dairy-free diets.

School and play dates are always somewhat difficult to handle. You may want to consider setting up a 504 plan with the school, which is a specialized education plan providing needed accommodations for children with health and other issues. The plan is usually very simple, specifying the child's allergens, a plan for snacks, lunches, and birthday parties, and an emergency plan if dairy is consumed. Whether a plan is needed or not, make sure all adults working with your child, including aides, therapists, and of course teachers, are familiar with your child's dietary needs.

Most families find sending pre-screened food to school the best way to preserve a dairy-free diet. It is often a good idea to keep a small stash of special treats, such as packaged cupcakes, on hand at school so your child can still participate fully in birthday parties and other special events.

Teach yourself and your child to read labels. FDA labeling guidelines have been updated over the past few years and now require that manufacturers list common allergens, including milk, in a simple and straightforward manner. Most foods will now say "Contains milk," or list ingredients like whey with the word "milk" following in parentheses. It is still important to read all labels fully, looking for terms like milk, whey,

casein, caseinate, cream, or butter. Be cautious of packages labeled "non-dairy" or "milk-free" since these sometimes still contain a small amount of milk protein (casein).

Some labels will include terminology such as "Made at a facility that also processes milk." While most manufacturers clean their equipment quite well when changing from production of one product to the next, children with life-threatening allergies may still want to avoid these products. A trace amount of milk protein may be present.

Products that are marked "vegan" or "kosher pareve" [but not kosher (d)] are usually dairy-free. Vegans are a type of vegetarians who do not consume dairy, so any product that is vegan is by definition non-dairy. Jewish people who keep a kosher diet do not mix meat and milk, so products that are marked or certified as kosher pareve contain neither meat nor milk and should be suitable for dairy-free diets. Be careful, however, because products that are marked "kosher (d)" do contain dairy.

Substitutions for Dairy

There are now hundreds of substitutions for dairy available on the market. Many are now available in standard supermarkets, and thousands of items can be found at specialty stores, including Whole Foods, Trader Joe's, or local health-food stores.

Listed below are a few commercially-available substitutes that have been taste-tested and kid approved:

Milk: Soymilk, ricemilk, almond milk, oat milk, hemp milk, and blends are widely available in most supermarkets. A very common soymilk is Silk, which produces a kid-friendly enriched and sweetened soy milk. Look for a brand that is fortified and enriched with calcium, Vitamin D, and other important nutrients. Some milks, like rice milk, tend to be low fat, while others are lower protein. Look for one with a good amount of both fat and protein.

Cheese: Many varieties are available. The best testing is Vegan Gourmet Cheese Alternative made by Follow Your Heart, in cheddar, mozzarella, and other flavors. This cheese actually melts well and tastes good. For children, cheese slices are always a big hit and Tofutti makes several tasty varieties. For children who also have soy allergies, a new version of Rice cheese that is 100% dairy-free is available, made by Galaxy Nutritional Foods.

Parmesan Cheese: Galaxy Nutritional Foods Vegan Parmesan-style topping is available at most Whole Foods and health food stores. Parma! by Eat in the Raw is another option that is also soy free.

Cream Cheese: The best by far is Tofutti's Better than Cream Cheese, available in tons of flavors.

Mayonnaise: Vegenaize, made by Follow Your Heart and found in the refrigerated section, and Nasoya original, a shelf-stable product, are both good alternatives.

Sour Cream: Again, Tofutti's Better than Sour Cream is the best tasting. Follow Your Heart makes a healthier version that is good for cooking.

Butter: There are many alternatives available, including Kosher margarines and vegan products. For spreading on rolls or bread, a good-tasting choice is Smart Balance Light with Flax Oil. There are many different varieties of Smart Balance available, so make sure you get the one marked Vegan. For baking, a good choice is Earth Balance buttery sticks or shortening.

Cream: The most common product available is Silk Non-Dairy creamer, which comes in several flavors. Be cautious of powdered creamers marked "non-dairy," as these often contain milk protein.

Whipped Cream: SoyaToo Soy Whip is good old fashioned whipped cream in a can. It is available at Whole Foods and other health food stores. A boxed variety is also available. It has a slightly bitter taste, unfortunately.

Pudding: ZenSoy makes vanilla, vanilla/chocolate, and banana pudding cups that are quite tasty.

Ice Cream: There are now hundreds of varieties available, including the soy-free Rice Dream brand. Ice cream sandwiches, ice cream bars, pints, and novelties are available at most stores. Some favorites include Purely Decadent by Turtle Mountain Foods, Tofutti Cuties (ice cream sandwiches) and pints, and So Delicious products, also by Turtle Mountain.

Yogurt: Many varieties are available in lots of flavors. Kids often like the readily available small O'Soy containers made by Stonyfield Farm. Whole Soy and Silk brands are also good.

Pizza: Premade pizza is still hard to find. The Tofutti brand is your typical "boardwalk-style" pizza but is not easily available. The easy-to-find Amy's brand makes two non-dairy pizzas, one with non-dairy cheese and another without cheese.

Chocolate: Many dark chocolate brands are dairy-free. Newman's makes a nice sweet dark chocolate bar, and Tropical Source bars come in many tasty flavors. Non-dairy chocolate chips are made by Tropical Source and some major brands. Green and Blacks makes a nice baking chocolate. Newer rice chocolate bars are also available, including boom Choco boom from Enjoy Life and Ricemilk Choco from Terra Nostra Organic.

Cookies: Surprisingly, a lot of store-brand cookies are actually dairy-free, though loaded with fat. There are also many non-dairy cookies available at health food stores that are

quite tasty. The best tasting by far are the huge cookies made by the Alternative Baking Company, though these are hard to find.

Cupcakes and Other Baked Goods: These are usually made locally. Call around in your area. We were pleased to find many regular bakeries willing to bake small milk-free cupcakes for school. Another local bakery makes muffins, scones, cakes, and even cheesecake that is unbelievable.

Egg Nog: While only available seasonally, Silk Nog tastes better than the real thing and is actually healthy.

For More Information

There are many sources on the web that are available to help with dairy-free diets, including allergy sites and vegan sites. Some of the best sources of non-dairy items come from vegan stores such as www.veganstore.com and www.veganessentials.com. Cookbooks are widely available as well, including allergy, vegan and kosher cookbooks that are filled with simple dairy substitutions.

Enjoy living dairy-free! It's really not that hard anymore, and has become much, much tastier!