

## Got soy? Consumer Reports drives off anti-science, anti-GMO cliff savaging conventional soy milk

Consumer Reports has been a sacred bible for me, providing evidence-based analysis of every day products that saves a lot of money without sacrificing quality. I'm 62 and I don't believe I've ever bought a car without consulting CR first.

Which makes it all the more distressing that this once venerable institution-in-a-magazine has driven off the science cliff in obeisance to the current anti-science, anti-GMO hysteria. [Brasse Tyson](#)—over

The latest consumer report, “Milk Alternatives: Should you sip or skip?” [alternatives to dairy](#)

Up Front | Trends

### Milk alternatives: Should you sip or skip?

**THE CHOICE** Alternatives seem more crowded lately. Soy milk has been around for years, but “milk” made from oats, seeds, grains, and coconut are gaining shelf space—and capturing the interest of consumers.

Twenty-one percent of Americans report picking up more milk alternatives, and 15 percent say they're buying less milk or none at all, according to a report from the market research firm NPD. These alternatives make life easier for vegans and people with dairy allergies and lactose intolerance, but how do they stack up nutritionally compared with milk? See what an 8-ounce glass of milk and milk alternatives give you.

**Cow's milk (1 percent)**

- 122 calories
- 8.2 grams protein
- 2.4 grams fat
- 31 percent of the recommended daily value for calcium

**Pro:** It has muscle-strengthening protein and bone-building calcium, phosphorus, and vitamin D.

**Con:** In addition to having some saturated fat, it contains lactose, a sugar that some people have trouble digesting. And allergens to proteins in cow's milk may be a concern, especially for children.

**Coconut milk (unsweetened or original)**

- 80 to 90 calories
- 4 grams protein
- 4.5 to 9 grams fat
- 30 to 45 percent of the recommended daily value for calcium

**Pro:** Not to be confused with the thicker stuff in cans, the coconut-milk beverage found in cartons in the dairy case is watered down to match milk's consistency and fat content. It's usually fortified with calcium and vitamin D; some brands add vitamin B12.

**Con:** In our testing of five coconut milks and coconut-almond blends, Silk Almond Coconut Blend Original was the tastiest. **Caveat:** It has fewer calories. It doesn't come in low-fat versions, so it's closer to whole or 2 percent milk. And the fat is mostly saturated. Depending on the brand, the milk may have a big coconut flavor or almost none at all.

**Soy milk (low-fat plain)**

- 60 to 80 calories
- 1 to 6 grams protein
- 1.5 to 3 grams fat
- 20 to 45 percent of the recommended daily value for calcium

**Pro:** Made from ground soybeans and water, it contains high-quality protein and is often fortified with 8 vitamins, calcium, and vitamin D, giving it the closest nutrient profile to cow's milk among the plant-based options.

**Con:** Flavored varieties have added sugars. And most soybeans are grown from genetically modified seeds. Look for brands with the USDA organic seal or the non-GMO verified label.

**Rice milk (unsweetened)**

- 90 to 100 calories
- 1 gram protein
- 2 to 3.5 grams fat
- 10 percent of the recommended daily value for calcium

**Pro:** It's one of the least allergenic.

**Con:** Our tests found that products made with rice, including rice milk, contain detectable levels of arsenic, a carcinogen. Our experts recommend drinking no more than 3 cups per day and not giving rice milk regularly to children younger than 5.

**Almond milk (unsweetened plain)**

- 30 to 50 calories
- up to 1 gram protein
- 2 to 3.5 grams fat
- 30 to 45 percent of the recommended daily value for calcium

**Pro:** Made from ground almonds and water, it's naturally lower in calories and fat than cow's milk. It supplies some vitamin E, and is often fortified with calcium and vitamin D.

**Con:** It's very low in protein. Check labels for sugar content; some brands are lightly sweetened, but others have the equivalent of almost a teaspoon.

**Hemp milk**

- 50 to 80 calories
- 2 to 3 grams protein
- 5 to 7 grams fat
- 30 to 50 percent of the recommended daily value for calcium

**Pro:** The hemp seeds used to make this milk are rich in omega-3 and omega-6 fats, which are good for the heart and brain. It's fortified with calcium and vitamin B12 and D.

**Con:** Hemp has an earthy, hempy flavor, which our sensory panelists deemed as acquired taste. You might see some jars or brown rice turp on the ingredients lists of some brands' sweetened varieties. But those aren't other names for sugar. Brown rice syrup may also contain arsenic.

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milk, such as soy, coconut and almonds.

As Kevin Folta, head of the University of Florida plant technology program [writes](#), the editors found fault in almost all of the milk alternatives, for instance pointing out that some contain “heavy metals.”

That's a new obsession on the fringe green left, particularly on huckster natural product sites like [Mike Adams' NaturalNews](#) and Joseph Mercola's [eponymous site](#), that try to scare people into buying 'natural' alternatives that are often untested, useless or worse.

Every major science agency around the world has determined that the kind of levels CR is noting are biologically meaningless, but that hasn't stopped it from issuing scare-o-grams. It's a missed opportunity

to educate consumers about the difference between unwarranted fears and genuine dangers, but that's the direction CR has been heading in in recent years.

But the most egregious CR scandal is its bonehead dissing of GMO soy milk. Upwards of 94% of the US soy crop is GMO so it's no surprise that your favorite edamame or your morning glass of soy is made from soy beans designed to be grown with fewer insecticides (Bt soy) and less toxic herbicides. (herbicide resistant soy). In its "Cons" section, CR encourages consumers to "Look for brands with the USDA organic seal or the non-GMO verified label."

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this best of the four products they tasted. Compared with the 1 gram of sugars in unsweetened soy milk, it has 8 grams (the equivalent of 2 teaspoons), mostly from added cane sugar.

**Soy milk (low-fat plain)**

- 60 to 90 calories
- 4 to 6 grams protein
- 1.5 to 2 grams fat
- 20 to 45 percent of the recommended daily value for calcium

**Pros** Made from ground soybeans and water, it contains high-quality protein and is often fortified with B vitamins, calcium, and vitamin D, giving it the closest nutrition profile to cow's milk among the plant-based options.

**Cons** Flavored varieties have added sugars. And most soybeans are grown from genetically modified seeds. Look for brands with the USDA organic seal or the non-GMO verified label.

**Rice milk (unsweetened)**

- 90 to 130 calories

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But why? It never explains, and based on CR's stated intention to rely on evidence to form its judgments, it's violating its own guidance. After all, there is not one published study that suggests that GM soy products are any less nutritious than alternatives; [nor are they, or any approved GMO food, harmful](#) in any way. In fact, it's well established that organic products, including soy milk, are more likely to have a higher risk of pathogen contamination. The fact that anti-GMO activists have scared people into seeking alternatives to GMO products should not be enough to classify GMO soy in a negative light—if Consumer Reports stood behind science rather than endorsing the latest misguided trend.

This is not the first time that activists have brandished their anti-science club to squash empirical based thinking on the issue of soy milk. In 2009, Dean Foods, owner of the Silk Soymilk brand, faced a barrage of criticism from food activists when it switched from organic to conventional soybeans, calling it their “natural” line—which was correct. The move was actually done for the best of reasons. Most certified organic soybeans are sourced from countries with low or non-existent labor standards; the switch to conventional soy means that workers would not be exploited to satisfy Silk Soymilk customers.

The radical Organic Consumers Association went on a rampage, calling for a boycott—and it was effective. Rather than stand by its ideals and its fair labor commitment, Dean caved, throwing its worker protection pledge under the bus to embrace the anti-GMO scare campaign. It now positions itself as a driver of the fear bus. “GMOs? No thanks,” it writes on its silk.com web page. “We think the less you mess with Mother Nature, the better.” Hmm, soy milk is a processed food; you have to do considerable “messaging” to get from the soy bean to the grocery store. Here's a [primer](#) on how it's processed.

Consumer Reports, of course, ignores all of this. As Folta notes, CR also offers a backdoor endorsement of organic and non-GMO verified brands—again, without any evidence to back it up.

The only difference between soy milk made with GM soy and alternatives is that the substitutes would almost certainly cost a heckuva a lot more because of the price premium extracted by organic producers. In other words consumers would be paying more for no benefits other than a psychic boost based on misinformation about the alleged dangers of GMO soy.

Is that the kind of advice that you want from Consumers Reports? How to spend more for no real benefits?

Who is steering this anti-science trend on CR? The key driver is almost certainly Michael Hansen, a senior staff scientist long known as a rogue outlier on the GM issue. Hansen is notorious for hyping the alleged potential dangers of GMOs in contrast with every major independent global science oversight committee in the world. Geneticist Val Giddings has provided a [comprehensive analysis](#) of Hansen's disinformation strategy at state legislatures where he is often asked to speak because of his connection to CR.

Hansen's director, Jean Halloran, is little better. She long ago [embraced](#) the style views of the activist Organic Consumers Association, referring to GM crops as “Frankenfoods,” and claiming that the US food regulatory oversight of GMO safety is a “fraud.”

If you're angry at this kowtowing by CR to the ant-science crowd, you can express your opinion directly by clicking through here and telling the editors of your concerns.

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