

Nutritional Deficiencies Seen with Milk Alternatives

Researchers caution the substitution of rice and soy beverages for milk in infants.

Two scientific journals in 2001 reported on 14 cases of malnutrition and nutritional deficiencies in infants in the U.S. whose parents had fed them rice or soy beverages as a substitute for milk.

Because of the growing interest in health foods and increasing concerns over milk allergies, some otherwise educated and economically stable parents have mistakenly substituted rice or soy beverages, that are so popular today, for milk.

The problem is not in the drink itself, but in assuming that they are equal nutritionally. A cup of milk has 120 calories, 300 milligrams of calcium, 8 grams of protein and is fortified with vitamins A and D. Unless they are *specifically fortified*, rice and soy beverages do not contain vitamin D or calcium, and the rice beverages contain very little protein.

As a result, cases of kwashiorkor (protein-energy) malnutrition from rice beverages and cases of rickets (vitamin D deficiency) which leads to soft bones have been seen in infants in the U.S. These conditions are typically observed in poverty-stricken areas of the developing world and are virtually unheard of in the U.S. since the 1920s.

Experts caution against using rice or soy beverages as a *substitute* for milk. A complete diet history is recommended if you use or are interested in using milk substitutes, or in having your infant follow a strict vegetarian diet. Speak to your pediatrician or registered dietitian to assure that your infant is meeting his daily-recommended levels of calories, protein, calcium, vitamin D and other nutrients.

References:

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