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THE SUITABILITY OF HUMAN BREAST MILK OVER COW MILK

Although **human milk** contains less calcium **than cow's milk**, the calcium in **human milk** is **better** absorbed into the body **than** the calcium in **cow's milk**, again illustrating why **human milk** is the best source of nutrition during the first year of life. Many nursing moms are told that they must introduce cow’s milk at a year. Your nursing toddler is already getting the best milk he can get – mother’s milk! Breast milk has a higher fat content than whole cow’s milk (needed for baby’s brain growth), and all the nutrients of human milk are significantly more bioavailable than those of cow’s milk because it is species specific (not to mention all the components of mother’s milk that are not present in cow’s milk).

There is no need to add cow’s milk to your toddler’s diet (or the equivalent nutrients from other milks or foods) as long as your baby is nursing at least 3-4 times per day. Cow’s milk is really just a **convenient** source of calcium, protein, fats, vitamin D, etc. – it’s not required. There are many people in many parts of the world who do not drink cow milk and still manage to get all the calcium, protein, fats, vitamin D, etc. that they need.

Pediatricians now recommend that any cow’s milk be whole milk from a cup after the first year and until the child is at least 2 years of age. This ensures that your child receives enough fat, which is essential to proper brain development. After the age of two, if growth is good, you can switch to low-fat or nonfat milk. Note: If your child is nursing, then remember that mom’s milk is whole milk – the more breast milk your child gets, the less need to worry about your child getting additional fat from whole milk or other sources.

It’s best to limit the amount of cow’s milk that your child receives to 2-3 cups (16-24 ounces) per day, since too much cow’s milk in a child’s diet can put him at risk for iron-deficiency anemia (because cow’s milk can interfere with the absorption of iron) and may decrease the child’s desire for other foods.

**Table 101. Comparison of the mineral and vitamin components of cow’s milk and human milk.**

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
|  | Cow's Milk (semi-skimmed, pasteurised) per 100g | Human Milk (mature) per 100g |
| Sodium (mg) | 43 | 15 |
| Potassium (mg) | 156 | 58 |
| Calcium (mg) | 120 | 34 |
| Magnesium (mg) | 11 | 3 |
| Phosphorus (mg) | 94 | 15 |
| Iron (mg) | 0.02 | 0.07 |
| Copper (mg) | Trace | 0.04 |
| Zinc (mg) | 0.4 | 0.3 |
| Chloride (mg) | 87 | 42 |
| Manganese (mg) | Trace | Trace |
| Selenium (ug) | 1 | 1 |
| Iodine (ug) | 30 | 7 |
| Retinol (ug) | 19 | 58 |
| Carotene (ug) | 9 | (24) |
| Vitamin D (ug) | Trace | Trace |
| Vitamin E (mg) | 0.04 | 0.34 |
| Thiamin (mg) | 0.03 | 0.02 |
| Riboflavin (mg) | 0.24 | 0.03 |
| Niacin (mg) | 0.1 | 0.2 |
| Vitamin B6 (mg) | 0.06 | 0.01 |
| Vitamin B12 (ug) | 0.9 | Trace |
| Folate (ug) | 9 | 5 |
| Pantothenate (mg) | 0.68 | 0.25 |
| Biotin (ug) | 3.0 | 0.7 |
| Vitamin C (mg) | 2 | 4 |