

# Drink up

More people are consuming milk and there is a wide variety to choose from

BY SEOW KAI LUN

MILK demand is on the rise in Singapore, according to a report from research firm Euromonitor International.

In its March 2014 report, Drinking Milk Products In Singapore, the research firm says 80,066 tonnes of milk products were consumed in 2013, compared to 71,299 tonnes in 2008 — a 12.3 per cent increase.

Euromonitor's research analyst Pei Ying Loh says Singapore consumers are "well informed and more aware of the advantages" of consuming dairy products and the importance of having calcium more regularly for stronger bones and teeth "at all ages".

She adds: "Being increasingly health-conscious, people are likely to prefer fat-free dairy products as well as those with added benefits such as Omega 3 DHA."

In fact, fat-free milk recorded the highest sales growth of 12 per cent from 2012 to 2013, the report adds.

Says Ms Saran Sinaram, senior dietitian, Raffles Diabetes & Endocrine Centre at Raffles Hospital: "Most local Singaporeans are still drinking milk, while those who are lactose-intolerant drink calcium-fortified soya milk. Many expatriates, on the other hand, opt for milk alternatives, such as almond and rice milk."

Aside from health reasons, people buy also buy alternative types of milk because they are on a vegan



diet or allergic to cow's milk, though the latter is rare.

However, dietitians interviewed say cow's milk is higher in calcium and the lactose aids in the absorption of calcium.

Ms Charlotte Lin, 31, dietitian at National University Hospital, says that, even when other milk is fortified with additional calcium, the amount of calcium one receives may be less than that from cow's milk.

Says Ms Jaclyn Reutens, 33, dietitian at Aptima Nutrition & Sports Consultants: "Switching to other types of milk must be done carefully so as not to adversely affect your individual daily nutrient requirements."

She adds that calcium should be had from a variety of foods and not just milk.

Non-dairy sources of calcium include leafy green vegetables, beans, cereals and fish with edible bones like sardines.

## Cow's milk

**Good stuff:** It is a great source of calcium, protein, vitamin A, riboflavin, vitamin D and phosphorous. This aids healthy bone and growth development.

When combined with a healthy diet, it helps to prevent the risk of osteoporosis and hypertension, says Ms Reutens. It is best to choose low-fat, plain versions.

**Be aware:** Fat full cow's milk is high in saturated fat that can increase LDL cholesterol and lead to heart disease, says Ms Sinaram.

Flavoured versions such as chocolate, strawberry and banana tend to be high in sugar and may cause dental caries and weight gain in children.

However, children under five should drink the full-fat version as they need the fat for healthy development of the brain, says Ms Reutens.

**Where to buy:** Supermarkets and convenience stores.

## Goat's milk

**Good stuff:** Goat's milk has similar nutritional properties as cow's milk, and so has comparable health benefits.

But it has slightly less lactose than cow's milk. So, people who are lactose-intolerant are better able to take goat's milk, says Ms Reutens.

**Be aware:** Goat's milk has a distinct taste and smell that can be off-putting.

It is higher in calories and fat content, with more than half of the fat content in saturated fat.

Consume only the pasteurised versions to make sure any organisms present have been killed. People who are allergic to cow's milk are also likely to be allergic to goat's milk.

**Where to buy:** Organic and health food stores.

## Soya milk

**Good stuff:** Derived from soaked soya beans that are ground and drained to produce a liquid, it is commonly used in Asia as a dairy substitute for those who are lactose-intolerant.

Its macronutrient profile is similar to cow's milk, which means it is high in protein and low in calcium, but unlike cow's milk, it has no cholesterol, says Ms Sinaram.

It is also low in saturated fats, says Ms Lin.

**Be aware:** Soya milk is naturally low in calcium and does not contain vitamin B12, which is needed for brain and nervous system functions.

However, most soya milk available in supermarkets has been fortified with calcium to levels that are equivalent to those in cow's milk.

Soya milk available from markets or hawker stalls is not calcium-fortified and is low in these nutrients.

**Where to buy:** Supermarkets and convenience stores islandwide.



## Almond milk

**Good stuff:** Drunk since mediaeval times, almond milk is made from raw almonds that have been blanched in hot water, soaked and blended before the liquid is pressed out.

Almonds are rich in vitamin E, magnesium, selenium and calcium, explains Ms Sinaram, adding that it also contains flavonoids that are protective for the heart.

Flavonoids are antioxidants that neutralise over-reactive oxygen-containing molecules and prevent them from damaging part of cells. It also protects blood vessels from rupture or leakage and cells from oxygen damage.

It is a good alternative for people who are lactose-intolerant and have soy allergies. It is also recommended for those who have coeliac disease, an autoimmune disease that can result in inflammation and damage to the small intestine.

**Be aware:** The protein and calcium content is lower than in cow's milk. So, you should pick calcium-fortified almond milk if you are choosing this as a dairy replacement.

**Where to buy:** At coldstorage.com.sg and sgorganic.sg

## Oat milk

**Good stuff:** Dry oats are soaked or steamed before enzymes are added to separate soluble from insoluble fibres.

Oat milk is free of lactose and contains fibre that can reduce cholesterol levels.

**Be aware:** It has a low amount of protein per serving (or one glass) and has minimal amounts of calcium. So it is usually fortified with calcium.

Do read the ingredient list before buying as some varieties have salt and oils added, which hypertensive individuals should avoid, says Ms Reutens.

**Where to buy:** At coldstorage.com.sg, organiclife.com.sg and natural.sg

## Quinoa milk

**Good stuff:** Although quinoa milk has only half the protein found in cow's milk per serving, it contains all the essential amino acids. The fat in it is also mainly polyunsaturated and is beneficial to heart health, says Ms Sinaram.

**Be aware:** It has minimal amounts of calcium. Do check that no sugar or syrup has been added.

**Where to buy:** At organicdelivery.sg

## Rice milk

**Good stuff:** Brown rice is steamed or boiled to a high temperature with barley enzymes added to break down the carbohydrates into smaller molecules.

The mixture is then blended and strained to produce rice milk. Its consistency is similar to cow's milk and it is very low in fat, with zero cholesterol.

It is also the most hypoallergenic of all milk products as it is gluten-free and can be consumed by people who cannot take dairy products and have nut allergies, says Ms Sinaram.

**Be aware:** It is low in protein and does not contain many vitamins and minerals, compared to other types of plant milk, says Ms Reutens.

It is also higher in carbohydrates, containing as much as twice the regular amount. It can taste bland, so sugar and oil are sometimes added, she says.

**Where to buy:** At richricemilk.com and sgorganic.sg

