

## Chapter 1

# Living Dairy-Free: Beginning with the Basics

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### *In This Chapter*

- ▶ Understanding what it means to be dairy-free
  - ▶ Seeing who's avoiding dairy and why
  - ▶ Being well-nourished without milk and dairy products
  - ▶ Planning and preparing satisfying nondairy meals
  - ▶ Making a dairy-free lifestyle work for you
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**I**f you've picked up this book, you or someone you know may be thinking about making a major lifestyle change: going dairy-free. It's a big step that may take some getting used to. After all, milk — that bovine beverage that many folks drink with cookies and pour over cereal — is about as all-American as apple pie and corn on the cob. In fact, for most people in North America (and much of Europe, too), milk and foods made from it have been an integral part of everyday life for generations. And tradition is tough to change.

Still, you may be considering doing just that. Why? And how can you make do without a food that was deemed an entire food group in the government's dietary guidelines? I cover these questions and more in this chapter.

In this chapter, I also review what going dairy-free is all about. I explain who may be interested in cutting out dairy and why, discuss how going dairy-free affects your nutritional needs, provide tips for planning and preparing dairy-free meals, and show you how to get started after you've decided to make the switch.

## *Dairy-Free for You and Me: What It's All About*

After infancy, you don't need milk. It's a simple fact. Milk is a substance produced by mammals to nourish their newborn babies. Baby mammals — including humans — depend on milk until their digestive systems have had enough time to mature and allow them to eat solid food. (You can read more about nature's first food and its link to lactose intolerance in Chapter 3.)

After they begin eating solid food, the animals don't go back to drinking milk. That is, of course, unless they're human. Some human adults — a minority of the world's population — drink milk from cows, goats, and other large mammals. Although this practice of milk drinking isn't natural, it goes back to ancient times. Many people like the taste of milk, and it has nutritional value. However, it also has drawbacks — a greater number for some people than for others. The following sections take a closer look the dairy dilemma — why people place importance on milk and why it's a problem for some folks.

### *Moo juice: Getting the skinny on why milk matters*

Milk is a concentrated source of certain nutrients, such as protein, calcium, and the B vitamin riboflavin. Its nutritional value isn't surprising, given that cow's milk is created to help calves grow and develop in a short time into large animals with massive skeletons and musculature. Milk from goats, water buffaloes, and other herd animals is nutritionally similar to cow's milk.

When humans drink milk from one of these large creatures, they get a big dose of protein, vitamins, and minerals in a few gulps. In fact, milk is much more nutritious than many other beverages, including the following:

- ✔ **Fruit juice:** This beverage contains no protein or riboflavin. It also contains no calcium, unless it's fortified with the mineral. Depending on the type of juice, it may contain vitamin C, potassium, and other nutrients, though.
- ✔ **Soft drinks:** These drinks contain no essential nutrients. They're *empty calorie* drinks, meaning they contain calories but have no nutritional value in exchange for those calories. In other words, soft drinks are junk.
- ✔ **Coffee, tea, and water:** These beverages are in a different category. They contain no calories or essential nutrients (unless you add sugar and creamer, of course). They're simply fluids, and generally they're beneficial because they hydrate you. Caffeinated drinks, such as coffee and tea, contain substances that cause you to lose some fluid, but you gain far more fluid than you lose.



As compared with other beverages, milk is nutritious. That doesn't mean you need it, though. And along with the benefits, drinking cow's milk has some significant drawbacks. Depending on the type of milk or dairy products you eat, some dairy foods may be better or worse for you than others. As a matter of fact, some people can't drink milk at all. Why? Keep reading.

## *Understanding when a “good thing” is the wrong thing*

Sure, drinking milk has its benefits (see the preceding section), but as soon as you were eating apples and oatmeal as a child, you didn't need your mother's milk any more. You certainly didn't need milk from a cow when you were a baby, and that hasn't changed in adulthood.

In fact, most people lose their ability to digest milk. If they drink milk or eat dairy products, these folks experience a variety of unpleasant symptoms. Those symptoms, which may range from bloating and abdominal pain to cramps and diarrhea, are signs that their bodies are no longer equipped to handle milk. I cover this issue of lactose intolerance in detail in Chapter 3. In the long term, including milk in your diet may affect you in other ways, too, regardless of whether you can digest milk. (See the later section “Why do you do it? Looking at the many reasons for living dairy-free.”)

## *Being a dairy detective*

Dairy products are widespread, so if you're considering going dairy-free, you need to be aware of where dairy rears its ugly head in everyday foods. Doing without dairy requires being conscious of the varied places milk and milk products are used.

You easily can find the obvious sources of milk, including a glass of milk served with a slice of chocolate cake or the milk used to make pudding, ice cream, or cream of broccoli soup. Milk also is used to make yogurt, whipped cream, cream cheese, and other cheeses.



But even if you don't see them, dairy products are used in many other foods as well. Byproducts of milk, such as skim milk solids and casein, sometimes are used as ingredients in processed foods, including commercial piecrust, cookies, and crackers.

Small bits of dairy may be used in foods when you eat out, too. For example, Parmesan cheese often is added to Caesar salads, and buttermilk may be used to make a stack of pancakes. I include more examples of places you'll find dairy — including hidden sources of dairy ingredients — in Chapters 5 and 22.

## *Doing without Dairy: Who Is Affected and Why*

Like me, you may have been raised in a family or community where drinking milk and eating dairy products was the norm. You enjoyed drinking milkshakes and eating ice cream with your friends, and you ate grilled cheese sandwiches with your cream of tomato soup. You likely dunked your cookies into a glass of cold milk as well. And, of course, you kept a gallon of milk in your refrigerator at all times.

But you also may have known someone who didn't drink milk. That person may have said that she didn't like the taste of milk. Another common explanation is, "I like milk, but it doesn't like me." Today, it's much more common to meet people who don't eat dairy products, and that number is increasing rapidly. The following sections take a closer look at the people who live dairy-free and why they do so.

### *Getting a snapshot of who's going dairy-free*

In some countries, dairy foods aren't a major component of the culture's diet. In fact, they may not be eaten at all. In parts of Asia, for example, soymilk is much more common than cow's milk. In India, milk is used to make cheese, pudding, and yogurt, but these foods are eaten in small quantities as condiments or occasional treats. In Africa, some people don't drink any form of milk at all.

As more people from other countries move to the United States, they bring with them their food traditions. They open restaurants and ethnic grocery stores and sell foods from their native countries. These newcomers also are a growing market for products such as the soymilk, almond milk, and nondairy cheeses you may have noticed showing up more frequently in your neighborhood supermarket.

All this mobility around the world is creating a shift in eating habits and driving more people to go dairy-free. Newcomers to dairy-centric parts of the world, such as the United States and Canada, may already be used to a diet that's largely dairy-free. And they're exposing everybody else to the alternatives to the preferred dairy products. When given the choice, you may opt to go dairy-free. If that's the case, it's easier than ever to do.

## *Why do you do it? Looking at the many reasons for living dairy-free*

Going dairy-free makes a lot of sense for your health and for the environment. And, of course, different people do it for different reasons. Among those reasons are the following:

- ✔ **They can't digest cow's milk.** Most of the world's adults can't completely digest cow's milk. Some have so much difficulty digesting milk that they develop unpleasant symptoms, such as gas, bloating, abdominal cramps, and diarrhea, when they drink milk or eat other dairy products.
- ✔ **They want to support the health of the planet.** Animal agriculture, including the production and distribution of milk and other dairy products, takes a toll on the earth. It contributes to air and water pollution and global warming. It also requires large amounts of fossil fuels and fresh water supplies, and it plays a part in the overuse of antibiotics.
- ✔ **They have compassion for animals and people.** Modern methods of dairy farming raise ethical concerns about the manner in which animals are treated on factory farms. The dairy industry is associated with the meat industry, where retired dairy cows join animals raised for their meat. The animals are processed in slaughterhouses where animals are treated inhumanely and conditions are dangerous for workers.
- ✔ **They just don't like the taste of milk.** They may not find the taste or texture appealing, or they may be turned off by the thought of drinking mammary secretions from cows.
- ✔ **They want to take better care of their health.** Although dairy products do have some benefits, you can like dairy too much. It can be detrimental to your health in the amounts that Americans typically consume it. See the nearby sidebar "Contemplating the enormous amounts of dairy products in the standard American diet" to consider how much dairy the average person consumes.



Milk is devoid of dietary fiber, and it's high in artery-clogging saturated fat. When you drink milk or eat dairy products regularly, you risk pushing out of your diet foods you need in greater quantities, such as vegetables, fruits, and whole grains. You also raise your blood cholesterol levels and increase your risk for coronary artery disease, which can lead to a heart attack or stroke.

Generally, all these dairy-free folks like the convenience of alternatives such as soymilk, rice milk, and almond milk that are on the market now. I discuss the health, environmental, and ethical rationales for going dairy-free in greater detail in Chapters 2 and 20.

## Contemplating the enormous amounts of dairy products in the standard American diet

In countries like the United States and Canada, milk and other milk products play a prominent role in meals. If you're like a lot of people, you may melt cheese over your broccoli and tortilla chips. You also may add it to sandwiches, pizza, and casseroles. And you may eat chunks of cheese on crackers. You may even bread your favorite cheese and deep-fry it as an appetizer.

And if that's not enough, think about milk sold in gallon jugs. You pour it on your cereal in the

morning and drink it as a beverage with meals. You may eat yogurt and ice cream and cream cheese on bagels and in cheesecake, and you may top potatoes, burritos, and ice cream sandwiches and other desserts with sour cream and whipped cream. You may eat huge quantities of dairy products. It's too much for your body to handle.

## Getting the Nutrients You Need

If you were raised in a milk-centric culture, you probably equate drinking cow's milk with having strong bones and teeth. It's natural then to wonder — or even worry — about how you'll get what your body needs if you don't drink milk or eat other dairy products. The good news is that you don't need dairy products to get the nutrients you need.



Any health-supporting diet takes care and planning, whether or not it includes dairy products. Still, it's reassuring to know that there's no requirement for you to drink milk to be healthy. This section may put your milk concerns at ease.

If you don't drink milk or consume other dairy products, where do you get your calcium, vitamin D, riboflavin, and other nutrients typically associated with these products? It's one of the first questions your friends and family will ask you if you tell them you're going dairy-free. Rest assured that these nutrients are widely available in many other health-supporting foods. You probably already enjoy some of them.

You can find calcium in navy bean soup, almonds, fortified orange juice, and cooked kale. Sunshine is nature's natural source of vitamin D, though you also can get it in eggs and certain kinds of fish. Riboflavin and other vitamins, as well as all the minerals and other substances you need for good health, are widespread in other foods, too, including a range of fruits, vegetables, beans and peas, seeds, nuts, and whole grains. These are the healthiest foods you can possibly eat. (I delve deeper into these nutrients in Chapter 4.)



You can find plenty of nutrients in foods that may be new to you, too. If you don't mind experimenting a bit, some of these products may become new favorites. Examples include soymilk, almond milk, rice milk, nondairy cheese, soy yogurt, and other nondairy products. Most of them taste great and work in recipes in much the same way that cow's milk and traditional dairy products do. I discuss your nondairy food choices, including where to find the products and how to select them, in Chapters 6 and 7.

## *Digging In to Dairy-Free Meal Planning and Preparation*

Before you can go dairy-free, you need to soak up some knowledge and master a few new skills. Among the most important things you need to get a handle on are planning and preparing nutritious, good-tasting meals.



The more foods you fix for yourself at home, the more control you have over your diet. By preparing foods from scratch, you can more easily monitor the ingredients used and ensure that your meals are dairy-free.

The following sections give you the lowdown on removing the dairy from your kitchen, shopping for the products you need, and beginning to whip up some tasty dairy-free recipes at home.

### *Preparing to de-dairy your kitchen*

To fix your own dairy-free meals, you need to have the right ingredients on hand. But before you stock up on staples, you must purge your refrigerator and pantry of milk, milk products, and any packaged or processed foods made with dairy ingredients.

Look for and get rid of milk, cheese, yogurt, and ice cream. Remove margarine, sour cream, whipped cream, and cream cheese, too. Read food labels to check for hidden sources of dairy. Give away these unwanted dairy products to friends and family members outside your home. Or throw away amounts that are too small to keep.



The point is to remove these foods from sight so they don't distract you or create a psychological barrier to change. Leaving dairy products in your kitchen may make it too easy to fall back into old patterns of cooking and eating. Be thorough. I share more advice about ways to rid your home and your diet of dairy products in Chapters 5 and 6. After the dairy products are banished, you're ready to bring in the replacements, which I discuss in the next section.

## Selecting dairy-free supplies

Before you head to the store for your dairy-free supplies, sit down and think about what you need. Doing so increases your likelihood of having all the necessary staples to make a variety of appealing meals at home. Planning ahead also makes it more likely that you won't forget to pick up a key ingredient, saving you the time and hassle of a return trip to the store.



TIP

In between shopping trips, keep a running list of foods you need. A slip of paper attached to the refrigerator or cupboard door or on a notepad at the kitchen desk is a great way to keep a grocery list. Just don't forget to take it with you when you leave for the store. Or you can create a working list in your cellphone or PDA, which you probably carry with you at all times. Then, when you're at the store, you can pull out your phone and voilà, you have your list.

Where you shop is up to you, but many good, dairy-free products are available in more stores than ever before. Natural foods stores carry the widest range of nondairy products, such as soymilk, rice milk, almond milk, soy yogurt, nondairy cheese, and others. Because dairy-free foods are gaining in popularity, your regular neighborhood supermarket also is likely to carry some of these products. If you don't see what you want, ask the store manager about placing a special order.



REMEMBER

As you think about the foods you want to buy, keep these pointers in mind:

✔ **Comparison shop.** Private-label and store brands of popular, nondairy staples, such as soymilk, rice milk, and nondairy coffee creamer, may be high in quality but significantly cheaper than name brands. These products often are a good value. Prices of the same products can vary among stores, too, so shop around.

✔ **Buy for versatility.** If you buy plain soymilk or plain nondairy yogurt instead of sweetened, flavored varieties, you can use them in recipes that are sweet or savory.

For example, plain soymilk or rice milk can be poured over your cereal at breakfast, but it also can be used to make mashed potatoes for dinner. Vanilla-flavored milk, on the other hand, may taste great on cereal, but it wouldn't be a good choice in mashed potatoes or a quiche.

✔ **Read food labels carefully.** Scour ingredient labels to be sure the products you're buying are dairy-free. Small amounts of added dairy ingredients may be hidden in products you wouldn't suspect. I include lists of hidden dairy ingredients in Chapters 5 and 22.

To read more strategies for shopping and filling your home with nondairy staples, check out Chapter 7.

## *Cooking dairy-free*

Adapting your cooking style to accommodate dairy-free meals is relatively easy. That's because most nondairy substitutes for common dairy products behave similarly in recipes. For example, you can use nondairy milks — soy, almond, rice, and others — cup for cup in place of cow's milk in any recipe. You also can use dairy-free cheeses in many of the same ways that you always used dairy-based cheeses.



A few caveats are in order, but they aren't difficult to accommodate. For instance, some nondairy forms of cheese don't melt as well as dairy-based varieties. The fix? Mix the nondairy cheese into a hot, moist dish, such as a bowl of pasta or a casserole. The heat and moisture help the cheese to melt more completely.

I cover the ins and outs of cooking using nondairy ingredients in more detail in Chapter 8. For the most part, though, nondairy counterparts to traditional, dairy-based ingredients are easy to work with and taste great. They make it possible to continue to enjoy macaroni and cheese, cheesy nachos, or a glass of milk with your cookies — all dairy-free.

In addition to using these nondairy products, the other aspect of cooking dairy-free is simply exploring and adopting a greater range of foods in your diet that happen to be dairy-free. Consider the following examples:

- ✓ Many people find that pizza made with a variety of tasty toppings — minus the cheese — is a delicious and more healthful alternative to the gooey, greasy, cheesy varieties you may have eaten in the past.
- ✓ Whole-wheat pasta tossed with olive oil, basil, freshly steamed vegetables, toasted pine nuts, and chopped, fresh tomatoes — minus the cheese — is a sophisticated and satisfying alternative to dishes that are coated with salty commercial tomato sauce and gobs of melted cheese.

I provide plenty more examples of the foods you can experiment with in Part III. In this part, you can find dozens of quick and easy recipes to help you get started.

## *Moving toward a Dairy-Free Lifestyle*

Making diet changes is challenging for most people. You not only need to educate yourself about the lifestyle change and master new skills, but you also have to change your mindset about the way you eat. These tasks take time, patience, and work.

It also helps to have support from the people around you, including your family, friends, and co-workers. Throughout this book, I help you think about ways to recruit that support from those around you and how to minimize distractions that may otherwise threaten to derail your best efforts. Part IV is a great place to start. In that part, I cover how to respond in social settings and when away from home as you're incorporating a dairy-free lifestyle. I also discuss dairy-free living throughout the many stages of life. I get you started in the following sections.

## *Dealing with food in your relationships*

Whether it's the people closest to you — your immediate family and best friends — or those you work with at the office or in the community, food usually plays an important role in your relationships. Food traditions help people bond with one another. They bring people together and provide a common experience that most people value in their lives. Consider, for example, the happy memories you have of holiday meals or potluck dinners with your family and friends.



However, when you have a diet restriction that distinguishes you from others in your life, you may experience some tension in those relationships. So, it's a good idea to do what you can to bridge the differences and minimize the extent to which your dairy-free diet may prevent you from fully sharing or participating in meals with others.

You can minimize the extent to which your dairy-free diet affects your relationships in a number of ways. Maintaining a positive attitude and staying as flexible as possible are two good ways to help. Good examples of this advice in action include the following:



- ✓ **Asking for input:** Among your family members, discuss dairy-free meal options and ask for opinions about what everybody would like to eat. Make a list of nondairy dishes that everyone likes and make those dishes often.

Giving family members a voice and a vote on what you serve at meals is important. People who participate in meal planning are more likely to feel a sense of buy-in and be more satisfied with the outcome as a result.

- ✓ **Compromising with solutions:** Discuss compromises to make meal planning less work. For example, instead of making two different entrees — one with cheese and one without — brainstorm options that keep you from having double the work.

For example, you may opt to make a dairy-free pasta tossed with garlic, olive oil, and vegetables one night for everyone at the table — dairy eaters and those who avoid dairy alike. At the next meal, you may opt to serve a dairy-loaded entree and a salad. You can allow the salad to pull double duty as a side dish for dairy eaters and an entree salad for others. Add garbanzo beans and sunflower seeds for protein and crunch.

I provide some more detailed examples of how to make meal planning in a mixed household (some dairy eaters and some avoiders) easier in Chapter 15. Going dairy-free with your children can be particularly challenging, but it is doable. Check out Chapter 18 for loads of child-friendly tips and strategies.

## *Managing your diet outside the home*

Just as developing skills for dealing with diet differences inside your home is important, understanding how to manage relationships when you're away is essential. You can anticipate situations in which you'll be a guest at somebody's home for dinner and think about the most comfortable way to broach the topic of your food preferences with your host.

For example, should you tell your host at the time of the invitation? Should you offer to bring a dish? Or would you rather keep your diet difference to yourself, take your chances, and dodge the dairy as necessary? The choice is yours, but it's one you should give some thought to before being faced with the dilemma. Thinking about the possibility ahead of time makes the decision clearer to you the next time you're faced with the situation.

Of course, you'll eat out at places other than people's homes, too — at restaurants, for example. So you'll need a set of skills for sticking to your dairy-free diet at the many different types of eating establishments. Some restaurants are more likely than others to provide you with a range of appropriate dairy-free menu choices. Many ethnic restaurants, including those that serve Chinese, Ethiopian, and Middle Eastern foods, traditionally include a good number of menu items made without milk or cheese.



If you're unsure about the menu, be assertive and ask your server questions about how foods are prepared. Better restaurants will make your food to order, giving you the option to omit the dairy. I cover these issues related to eating away from home in more detail in Chapters 15 and 16.

## *Experiencing a dairy-free lifestyle during all of life's stages*

Living dairy-free is a fine choice throughout your entire life. After early infancy (when, technically, no one is dairy-free), children, teens, and adults of all ages can safely live without milk. I describe dietary considerations for all these times of your life in Chapters 17, 18, and 19.



A good diet is one that supports health for the long term. It's an eating style you can stick with — and enjoy — forever. Living dairy-free can meet both of these goals. Unlike fad diets that ask you to eat nothing but cabbage soup or cookies for weeks on end, living dairy-free is natural. Humans don't require

cow's milk, so avoiding milk and dairy products isn't harmful in any way. On the contrary, for many people, continuing to eat dairy foods compromises their health. For whatever reason you choose to go dairy-free, do it with confidence.