

# Dairy Free Diets

**Within this issue, allmanhall's column (formerly aviso) focuses on nutrition for one of its key client sectors, care homes. Elderly people can be particularly susceptible to malnutrition for a number of reasons, so Tess Warnes BSc RD, allmanhall's Registered Dietitian, focuses attention on managing dairy free diets in a care home setting.**

An increasing number of people are now excluding dairy from their diet for multiple reasons, such as veganism, environmental, dairy allergy or lactose intolerance. Managing dairy free diets in a care home setting can have its challenges, because dairy products are often nutrient rich and therefore an important way for residents to meet nutritional requirements. However, with careful management and consideration these issues can be well managed.

## There are a number of challenges associated with a dairy free diet

- Meeting nutritional requirements
- Sourcing alternative milk free foods
- Cooking with milk free foods.

## Nutritional considerations

Older adults are at higher risk of malnutrition. Malnutrition is a major public health issue costing the NHS over £19 billion per year in England alone. There are approximately 3 million people in the UK who are malnourished or at risk of malnutrition; 93% are living in their own home, 5% are living in care homes and just 2% are in hospital (*Elia M, Russell C. 2009. Combating Malnutrition: Recommendations for Action. Report from advisory group on malnutrition led by BAPEN*).

Dairy and dairy products are considered a nutritious and easy way to increase calories in individuals' diets, as well as increasing the nutritional intake. Dairy is high in calcium, phosphorus, vitamin A, vitamin D (in products fortified with vitamin D), riboflavin, vitamin B12, protein, and magnesium. Excluding dairy from the diet could leave someone at high risk of malnutrition.

Choosing alternatives to milk, yoghurt and custard that are fortified with calcium is essential. Many now contain as much calcium as you would find in cows' milk (120 mg per 100 mls). Ensure that for every dairy dish on the menu there is an equivalent dairy free dish, which has fortified milk/dairy free

cream added to boost the calories if needed. Below are some ideas to boost the calories/nutrients for those struggling:

- Use soya alternatives to meat, yoghurt, milk and custard
- Add soya/oat cream alternatives to porridge
- Add peanut butter to smoothies
- Add cashew nuts or silken tofu to soups and blend
- Use crumbled tofu and vegan mayonnaise as a sandwich filling
- Add olive oil to vegetables
- Add vegan spread to potato.

## Sourcing alternative milk/dairy free foods

There is a large range of milk/dairy free alternatives now on the market which makes creating a dairy free menu much easier.

- Milks – oat, soya, flaxseed, sesame, rice, pea, coconut, quinoa, hemp, potato and nut\* (e.g. almond, hazelnut, cashew)
- Spreads – milk free and vegan spreads
- Cheese – hard, soft, melting and parmesan varieties of milk free cheeses based on soya, pea, cashew, almond, rice or coconut
- Yoghurts and desserts – soya, pea, coconut, oat, almond\* ice creams and frozen desserts – soya, rice, coconut, almond\* and cashew\*
- Creams/ crème fraiche – soya, oat, rice, coconut and almond\*
- Lactose free milk, yoghurt, cheese – these are only suitable for those with lactose deficiency, they are NOT suitable for milk allergy sufferers or those following a vegan diet.

\* Avoid nut-based milk alternatives for those who have/are at risk of a nut allergy.

## A dairy free diet in summary

With the large growth in veganism over the last few years, catering for an individual on a dairy free diet is considerably easier now, with such an extensive range of products. The key is to ensure that there is always a nutritious dairy free alternative for those needing it on the menu, and to give careful consideration to the nutritional profile of these dishes aiming to match them to the dairy equivalent as much as possible.

allmanhall are food procurement experts, food service consultants and dietitians. The team has a wealth of experience accumulated from working in a range of settings, including: clinical, corporate, education, food industry and research. We believe that everyone should be able to make well-informed choices about what they eat and drink to enable enhanced wellbeing. Interested to find out more?

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