

CAN CATS DRINK MILK? THE ULTIMATE GUIDE TO CATS DRINKING MILK



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Domestic cats that we know and love today have evolved from ancestors who lived in deserts. Cats are well known for not drinking much, hydrating themselves with the moisture content found naturally in their prey.

In the wild cats wouldn't choose to drink water as we present it in a bowl, their instinct tells them it's safer to drink from flowing sources of water as it's fresher. This is why cats in our homes are sometimes found drinking from a tap and why they like the water fountain-style drinking stations.

Like many cat parents, you may have seen your pet eyeing up the milk on your cereal and wondered “can cats drink milk?”

While cats can drink cow's milk if they get the chance, the topic of whether or not milk is good for cats is a little more complicated, and cats should never be offered cow's milk to drink.

In this guide, we'll answer the question “Can cats drink milk?”, and explore the health implications of cats drinking milk so you can make the right decisions for your pet.

So, can cats drink milk?

Kittens' bodies are suited to drinking their mother's milk like any other mammal, but as cats mature, their body tends to lose the enzymes needed to properly break down and digest milk. Although some kittens can drink cow's milk with relatively fewer ill effects compared to mature cats, it's still important to remember that milk is bad for cats of all ages. Without the enzyme needed to digest milk, most cats are lactose intolerant, and drinking milk is likely to cause digestive issues like vomiting, diarrhoea, and abdominal pain.

Although some people believe cow's milk is good for cats due to the nutritional benefits it has for people, there's really no nutritional value in letting your pet drink cow's milk, and it can even introduce an unhealthy amount of calories and fat to their diet.

As cat nutrition experts, we often get asked the question "Can cats drink milk if it's plant-based?" Plant-based milk is good for cats relative to normal cow's milk due to it being lactose-free. However, it's still important to note that some plant-based milks are high in calories, or made with sweeteners which can also cause digestive issues in cats.

The risks of milk consumption for cats

Although cats will drink cow's milk when they're given the opportunity, milk is bad for cats and should be avoided.

Here are some key risks of thinking cats and kittens can drink cow's milk to help you in [understanding digestive problems in cats](#).

Lactose intolerance

The majority of cats are lactose intolerant and lack the enzymes they need to break down lactose. Although milk contains valuable nutrition such as protein and calcium to a human, it is a less valued source of nutrients for a cat because their body struggles to process it which dramatically affects the absorption of any nutrients and gives them a nasty tummy ache too.

Digestive upset

Due to cats' lactose intolerance, consuming cow's milk can often lead to an upset tummy, causing digestive issues like vomiting and [diarrhoea in cats](#). Even if you don't notice these symptoms, it's likely that consuming milk will cause unseen digestive issues like abdominal pain and discomfort.

Nutritional imbalance

Although milk is a fairly nutritious drink for humans, it doesn't provide the same kind of nutrition for cats. Cats require essential nutrients such as protein and taurine for a balanced and nutritious diet, and giving them milk in place of nutritionally complete cat food with water will rob them of the nutrients they need to stay healthy.

Weight gain

Milk is very high in calories and fat compared to foods that have been specially formulated for cats. Consuming this in excess could lead to unhealthy weight gain and obesity.

Poor dental health

Although the calcium in milk and dairy products is essential for people's oral health, the high concentration of lactose and other sugars in milk can contribute to dental issues.

Milk alternatives for cats

There are certain alternative milk for cats which will help to avoid the health issues associated with drinking milk and could even support a cat's essential nutrition.

Here are some of the milk alternatives for cats to consider if you'd like to give your cats milk:

- **Made-for-cats milk**, like [WHISKAS® Cat Milk\(open in new tab\)](#), is formulated to be low in lactose and enriched in essential nutrients like vitamins and calcium. This kind of specially formulated milk is always the safest option when looking for alternatives to giving cows' milk to cats.
- **Plant-based milk**, such as almond milk, coconut milk, and oat milk, are lactose-free and so are a good way to avoid the digestive issues that stem from lactose intolerance. These milk substitutes can still be quite high in fats and oils, however, so it's always important to check the label and research how the contents of plant-based milk will affect your cat's diet. These products will also contain other novel ingredients which cats would not naturally choose to consume, so are best avoided.
- **Lactose-free milk**, made by removing the lactose from cow's milk, can also be a good way to feed cats milk while avoiding the digestive problems that come from lactose.
- **Goat's and sheep's milk**, while it still contains lactose, is much lower in lactose than regular cow's milk. While not ideal, these kinds of milk will have a lower risk of causing a tummy upset for your cats.

Kittens can generally be introduced to water at the age of three to four weeks. At this stage, cat parents should look out for cues that it's time to wean their cats onto water, such as cats becoming more curious and independent, and showing interest in their mother's water bowl.

When you notice these cues, you can start to provide kittens with access to fresh water, though it's important that this is in a shallow dish like a saucer to eliminate the risk of accidental drowning. Though some kittens may not take to it straight away and will prefer to stick to their mother's milk, most healthy kittens will eventually transition to drinking water at their own pace.

As your kittens move from nursing to a mature cat's diet, you can start introducing them to nutritionally complete cat food to complete their diet. [Perfect Fit™ Junior Cat food](#) will provide all their essential nutrients while they're still a kitten, and [Perfect Fit™ Cat food](#) will help ensure a balanced diet when they reach maturity around one year old.

Final thoughts

Although a lot of cats love the taste of milk, and there are a lot of myths surrounding its nutritional value, cat parents should generally avoid giving milk to cats to avoid digestive issues and maintain their health as much as possible.

We hope this guide has helped clear up some of the misconceptions you may have had about cats drinking milk, and given you a good reference to give your cats a diet that's as healthy as possible.

For more information on weaning kittens of their mother's milk and making sure they're getting the nutrition they need, be sure to check out our handy guide: [My Kitten Becoming an Adult Cat](#).

FAQs

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1. **When to introduce water to kittens?**

Kittens can drink milk from their mother from the moment they're born. However, as they grow and become more active, they'll eventually need to move on to drinking water and a diet that's more in line with the nutritional needs of cats.

2. **Can cats drink milk?**

The short answer is no. Although cats can drink cow milk, and many will given the chance, milk is bad for cats for a number of reasons.

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