

Casein-Free Diet: What to Eat, What to Avoid & Where Casein Hides

If you or your child is avoiding dairy due to allergies, autism, sensitivities, or a specific health condition, understanding the difference between casein and lactose is key. Casein is the *protein* found in milk and dairy products and is often hidden in surprising places. This guide helps you identify safe foods, foods to avoid, and common sources of hidden casein. (*lactose is the sugar in dairy, not a protein*)

Foods You Can Eat on a Casein-Free Diet

Fruits & Vegetables

- All fresh, frozen, and dried fruits (unsweetened)
- All vegetables (steamed, raw, or roasted)

Proteins

- Fresh meats and seafood (unprocessed)
- Eggs
- Beans, lentils, legumes
- Nuts, seeds

Grains

- Rice, quinoa, oats, corn, buckwheat, millet
- Casein-free cereals, pasta, breads (check labels)

Dairy-Free Alternatives (Soy-Free)

- Almond milk, oat milk, coconut milk, rice milk
- Coconut- or almond-based yogurt
- Nut-based cheeses (read labels)

Healthy Fats

- Olive, avocado, and coconut oil
- Nut butters (almond, cashew)

Foods to Avoid

Dairy Products

- Milk (cow, goat, sheep)
- Cheese (all types)
- Butter, cream, ghee
- Ice cream, yogurt, kefir
- Whey protein (unless labeled casein-free)
- Caseinates (sodium or calcium)

Processed Foods

- Flavored chips or snacks
- Protein bars with dairy
- Bakery items with milk powder
- Processed meats (unless dairy-free)

Hidden Sources of Casein

Watch out for casein in:

- Creamy sauces (Alfredo, cheese sauce)
- Ranch and blue cheese dressing
- Pesto (with Parmesan)
- Non-dairy creamers
- Some margarine
- Some medications and supplements (check “inactive ingredients”)

Label Clues:

Look for ingredients like:

Casein, caseinate, milk protein, milk solids, whey protein concentrate

**Pro Tips**

- **Lactose-Free ≠ Casein-Free**
Lactose-free products still contain milk protein (casein).
- **Check Labels Carefully**
Even "non-dairy" items may contain casein in small amounts.
- **Cook at Home**
Homemade meals give you full control over what's in your food.