FOOD & PLANTS

Can Cats Drink Milk or Eat Cheese?

Most cats are better off without either. Cats make less lactase once they are weaned, so milk and other dairy can cause vomiting, diarrhea and gas. Kittens need milk replacer, never cow's milk.

By Catt County Cat Nippers • Reviewed October 28, 2026 • 4 min read • 7 cited sources

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The short answer

It's best not to. The ASPCA explains that pets don't make much lactase, the enzyme that breaks down the sugar in milk, so milk and other dairy can cause diarrhea or other digestive upset. VCA counts the saucer of milk among the myths about feeding cats.

Even a cat that digests milk well is better off without it: cow's milk adds fat and sugar a cat doesn't need, and many cats put on weight easily, PetMD's veterinarian notes. For a cat that loves milk and handles it fine, a teaspoon once or twice a week is unlikely to do harm; more, or more often, can cause problems over time.

The drink a cat needs is fresh water.

AT A GLANCE

- No oat or almond milk either: plant milks can be high in fat and contain sugars, oils, thickeners, additives and salt that are hard for a cat to digest (PetMD).
- The "cat milk" sold at pet stores is a treat, not a food, and not a formula for kittens.

Why milk upsets most cats

Kittens are born able to digest their mother's milk. As they wean, they make less and less lactase: PetMD puts the change at around 8 weeks of age, and VCA says that by about 12 weeks kittens lose the ability to digest milk sugar.

Without enough lactase, the milk sugar, lactose, travels on undigested and pulls water into the intestines, which causes diarrhea. Bacteria in the colon feed on the sugar and make gas (PetMD).

The signs usually show within about 12 hours of the milk: vomiting, diarrhea, gas and a sore belly (PetMD).

Dairy and drinks at a glance

WHAT A CAT CAN DRINK

Drink	For a cat?	Why
Fresh water	Always	The one drink a cat needs, in a clean bowl
Cow's or goat's milk	No	Most cats make little lactase: milk can cause vomiting, diarrhea and gas (ASPCA, PetMD)
Cream and ice cream	No	Dairy, and richer still: cream has more fat than milk, and ice cream adds sugar
Cheese and yogurt	Better not	Dairy, so they can upset a cat's stomach for the same reason milk does (ASPCA)
Oat, soy, almond or coconut milk	No	Can be high in fat, with sugars, oils, thickeners, additives or salt that are hard for a cat to digest (PetMD)
"Cat milk" from the pet store	A treat only	Not a food, and not a formula for kittens (Kitten Lady)
Kitten milk replacer	Only for kittens too young for food	Made to stand in for a mother cat's milk (PetMD, Best Friends)

Treats of every kind, cat milk included, should stay under about 10% of the day's food (AAHA).

This quick sheet is the start of the guide. Still to read: Never give cow's milk to kittens, Helping a cat drink more water, If your cat drank milk and 1 more section, plus the What Cats Can & Can't Eat Chart. Read it all free when you join our pet health emails at cattcountycatnippers.org/articles/can-cats-drink-milk

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