A label-based assessment of the iodine content of milk-alternative drinks available in the UK

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UK milk is a rich source of iodine [average concentration 300 µg/L(1)] and, together with dairy products, is the principal source of iodine intake(2). UK sales of milk alternatives (e.g. soya drinks) increased by 155% between 2011 and 2013(3). As consumers may be choosing milk-alternatives in place of iodine-rich milk, we aimed to collate data on the iodine content of these products.

A survey of UK grocery stores (n = 20) identified 28 milk-alternative brands. Ingredient information was taken from the product label and companies were contacted for data on the iodine content of milk-alternative drinks.

Only three of 28 brands (10·7%) had information on the iodine content of their products. Of those, two stated the iodine content on the label; these products were fortified to give an iodine concentration of 225/230 µg/L. One brand of oat drink had a reported content of 1 µg/L. As reported in the literature, the values for the iodine content of unfortified soya and rice drinks ranged from 10–29 µg/L. Four brands used seaweed for calcium enrichment and, based on the literature, their estimated iodine content was 40–50 µg/L.

The iodine content of unfortified milk alternatives is largely unknown by their producers. Fortified soya drinks had an iodine concentration close to the value for UK summer cows’ milk and thus could be considered a reasonable substitute. As the iodine content of unfortified milk alternatives is low, consumers should ensure adequate iodine intake from other sources. Laboratory analysis of the iodine concentration of milk-alternative drinks is required to provide accurate values for food tables.

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