

Lactose Intolerance

What is lactose intolerance?

Lactose is the simple sugar found in milk and milk products. It can also be found in a variety of other foods and even as a filler in some pills and capsules

Lactose intolerance results from an inability to digest lactose in the small intestine due to the lack of the intestinal enzyme lactase. ... Lactose is the main carbohydrate or sugar found in milk, and in varying quantities in dairy products made from milk including yoghurt, ice cream, soft cheeses and butter.

What causes lactose intolerance?

Lactose is digested in the small intestine by an enzyme called lactase. When lactase is absent, lactose passes through the intestine to the colon (large bowel), carrying extra fluid with it. In the colon, bacteria break down lactose into lactic acid and certain gases. Lactic acid is an irritant and laxative. It can cause symptoms such as bloating, diarrhea, abdominal cramps, and gas or flatus.

Lactase activity is reduced in people with certain intestinal conditions such as Crohn's disease and celiac disease. Patients taking certain drugs and alcoholic patients may also be lactose intolerant. Finally, patients with surgical removal of part of the stomach or a large portion of the small intestine may need to reduce lactose in the diet.

Dietary treatment of lactose intolerance

The dietary changes for lactose intolerance should initially include the exclusion of those foods highest in lactose such as milk, dairy products made from milk including yogurt, ice cream, soft cheeses and butter, sweetened condensed milk; instant hot chocolate and cocoa mixes, creamy soups and sauces...

-Calcium-fortified soy milk has no lactose, is low in fat and is a good source of vitamin D and calcium.

*If the symptoms resolve then small amounts of lactose containing foods may be reintroduced, and symptoms monitored.

*It is important to find a suitable replacement if important foods are excluded from the diet in order to prevent deficiencies of calcium, riboflavin (vitamin B2), and vitamin D which are found greatly in dairy products.

Special Considerations

Tolerance of lactose is variable: Some lactose-intolerant people are able to tolerate certain dairy products in small amounts without having symptoms.

Vitamin/Mineral Supplements: Generally patients who tolerate small amounts of lactose in their diet such as dairy products may have enough nutrients contrary to those who have to eliminate all lactose products and may experience some deficiencies. However, they should always check with their physician or dietitian if certain vitamin supplements and/or a calcium supplement are needed.

Lactase Digestive Aids and Products: Many people can drink milk in which the lactase has been partially or completely broken down.

Lactaid and Dairy Ease enzyme products: Dietary supplements in convenient lactase enzyme tablets for prevention of the symptoms of lactose intolerance.

- Drops: These are added to milk. 5, 10, or 15 drops per quart of milk will generally reduce lactose content by 70%, 90%, or 99% respectively over a 24-hour period
- Caplets/Capsules: A person chews or swallows 1 to 6 of these when starting to eat foods containing lactose