

TO YOUR HEALTH

Lactose Intolerance



What is Lactose Intolerance?

Lactose intolerance means the body cannot easily digest lactose; a type of natural sugar found in milk and dairy products. When lactose moves through the large intestine without being properly digested, it can cause uncomfortable symptoms such as gas, abdominal pain and bloating. Some people who have lactose intolerance cannot digest any milk products, while others can consume small amounts without problems. Lactose intolerance may run in families and symptoms usually develop during the teen or adult years. Symptoms may worsen later in life.

What Causes Lactose Intolerance?

Lactose intolerance occurs when the small intestine does not make enough of an enzyme called lactase, which the body needs to break down or digest lactose. Problems with lactose intolerance may be permanent or temporary.

Causes for the lack of lactase can vary. Sometimes the small intestine stops making lactase after a short-term illness, such as an infection, or as part of a lifelong disease, such as cystic fibrosis. Other people may not be able to tolerate lactose due to other diseases, such as bacteria overgrowth or Celiac disease or Crohn's disease

Symptoms of Lactose Intolerance

Symptoms of lactose intolerance can be mild or severe, depending on how much or little lactase one's body makes. Symptoms usually begin 30 minutes to 2 hours after eating or drinking milk products. Symptoms of lactose intolerance may include:

- Bloating
- Pain or cramps

- Gurgling or rumbling sounds in the stomach
- Gas
- Loose stools or diarrhea
- Vomiting

A sick feeling after drinking a glass of milk one time does not mean the cause is lactose intolerance. However, a sick feeling every time a person consumes milk, ice cream, or another dairy product, may be the result of lactose intolerance.

How is Lactose Intolerance Diagnosed?

If you are experiencing the common symptoms of lactose intolerance, consult with your gastroenterologist. In order to diagnose this condition, a gastroenterologist can observe a patient's response to reducing the amount of dairy foods from their diet. The diagnosis can also be confirmed by a gastroenterologist using a lactose hydrogen breath test. This simple test requires the patient to drink a liquid that contains high levels of lactose. Then, your doctor measures the amount of hydrogen in your breath at regular intervals.

What Treatments Are Available?

There is no cure for lactose intolerance. There are treatments available to lower symptoms by limiting or avoiding milk products. Some people use milk with reduced lactose, or they substitute soy milk and soy cheese for milk products. Others take dietary supplements called lactase products that help digest lactose.

One of the biggest concerns for people who are lactose intolerant is making sure they get enough of the nutrients found in milk products, especially calcium. Calcium is most important for children, teens, pregnant women, and women after menopause. There are many nondairy foods that contain calcium, including:

- Broccoli, okra, kale, collards and turnip greens
- Canned sardines, tuna and salmon
- Calcium-fortified juices and cereals
- Calcium-fortified soy products such as soy milk, tofu and soybeans
- Almonds

Calcium supplements may also be recommended.

Additional patient information about digestive health topics are available online at www.PAGIconsultants.com



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