

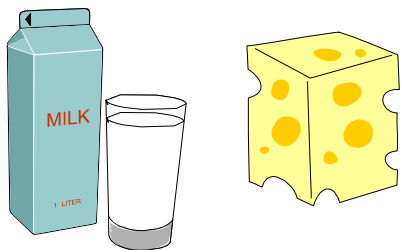
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Lactose Intolerance

LACTOSE INTOLERANCE
Affects persons of all age groups. The condition is very prevalent in the world population, especially among Blacks, Asians, and South Americans.

Intolerance to lactose is caused by a deficiency of lactase, the enzyme that digests the sugar in milk. Undigested lactose remains in the gut and results in bloating, cramps, and diarrhea.



In most cases, it is not necessary or nutritionally wise to consume a lactose-free diet. Avoiding dairy foods can cause inadequate intakes of calcium and many other essential nutrients. A deficiency of calcium increases the risk of developing osteoporosis, hypertension, and possibly some types of cancer.

Even under severe conditions, lactose intolerant individuals can consume the amount of lactose in ½ cup of milk without experiencing symptoms. Many individuals can consume the amount of lactose in one to two cups of milk when given with a meal, without experiencing adverse symptoms.

The high solids and/or fat content of frozen yogurt and ice creams may be tolerated by persons with lactose intolerance. Most cheeses, especially those aged six months or longer such as Cheddar and Swiss, are well tolerated because of their negligible lactose level and content of solids.

Individuals who have difficulty tolerating even small amounts of lactose, dairy foods with 70% to 100% of their lactose removed are available. Alternatively, commercially available lactase preparations can be directly added to milk to reduce its lactose content. Lactase enzyme tablets also can be consumed to help individuals digest lactose.

WHAT IS THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN LACTOSE INTOLERANCE AND MILK ALLERGY?

A food allergy develops when the body mistakes a food for a dangerous foreign invader. The immune system reacts with an abnormal response. For some people, food allergies can be life threatening.

Lactose intolerance has nothing to do with the body's immune system. However, many of the physical symptoms of lactose intolerance are the same as for a milk allergy. Therefore, it is very important that symptoms be evaluated and diagnosed by a specialist.

*Food and Nutrition Services
can assist in providing
nutrition information.
Call 703-813-4800
and ask for a
Registered Dietitian.*