

# Lactose Intolerance

## What is lactose intolerance?

Lactose is a type of sugar found in milk from animals (cow, sheep and goat). Lactose intolerance is caused by a deficiency of lactase, an enzyme which is found in the lining of the gut. You need this enzyme to absorb and digest lactose. If lactose is undigested it stays in your intestine and will cause uncomfortable symptoms. Lactose intolerance is different to a milk allergy which is caused by the protein in milk, not the sugar.

## What are the symptoms?

Symptoms of lactose intolerance are similar to symptoms of coeliac disease and include:

- Bloating
- Stomach pain and/or cramps
- Diarrhoea
- Flatulence, wind
- Nausea

## Why is lactose intolerance associated with coeliac disease?

Lactose intolerance is not an autoimmune disease but it can sometimes be associated with coeliac disease. This is because coeliac disease damages the gut and then the body doesn't make enough lactase, or the enzyme that is made doesn't work properly.

Once you are on a gluten free diet, your gut will begin to heal and you will start to digest lactose again. In most people with coeliac disease lactose intolerance is usually temporary.

## What should I do if I think I have lactose intolerance?

The first step is to speak to your doctor or dietitian. It is important that you do not immediately cut out lactose from your diet until you have discussed your symptoms with your medical professional.

To identify if you do have lactose intolerance your doctor or dietitian may suggest that you totally exclude all foods that contain lactose from your diet. Your symptoms should improve within a few days. You can then gradually increase the amount you eat until your symptoms appear, then stick to having just below this amount in your diet. Your dietitian can supervise this and make sure you are not missing out on important nutrients which you would usually get from milk and other dairy foods.

## Diet tips for managing lactose intolerance and coeliac disease.

People with lactose intolerance can usually have some lactose in their diet. In fact, eating some lactose can actually help your body become more tolerant to it.

The amount of lactose that you can eat without getting symptoms varies from person to person, so you will need to have specific advice and monitoring from a dietitian.

The following suggestions may help:

- Choosing calcium enriched products is important to ensure you get enough calcium.
- Soy and rice milks are lactose-free.
- Milk which has been treated to reduce its lactose content is available from supermarkets.
- Although made from milk, yoghurts and cheeses (hard and soft) are very low in lactose and can be eaten by most people with lactose intolerance.
- All butter and some margarines are lactose-free.
- Including milk with food may help your body to digest lactose, such as adding milk to mashed potato.
- Gluten free foods can sometimes contain milk as an ingredient. Most people with lactose intolerance do not need to avoid these foods. If you are concerned, you can contact gluten free manufacturers directly about ingredients of specific products.

### Calcium

People with coeliac disease are at risk of developing osteoporosis, so it is important to have a gluten free diet that is rich in calcium to help keep your bones strong. You can find calcium in non-dairy foods including: tinned fish with bones, soy yoghurts, plain tofu, sesame seeds, kidney beans and dried figs. Read our 'Osteoporosis' leaflet for more information about eating enough calcium.

*This information is for guidance only and should not replace advice given by your medical professional.*

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