

Lactose Intolerance

How prevalent is Lactose Intolerance? About 70% of the world's population just can't drink milk or eat dairy products (except yogurt) without getting an upset stomach. Lactose Intolerance is genetic and happens most often in people of African, Asian and Mediterranean descent. Lactose Intolerance is caused by a deficiency of lactase, an enzyme needed to absorb and digest milk sugar i.e. lactose. Undigested lactose lingers in the colon and ferments, creating intestinal distress - abdominal pain, bloating, gas and diarrhea - that sometimes defies diagnosis or is misdiagnosed as serious bowel disease.

So don't believe you have a serious bowel disorder until you are sure milk is not at fault. Read Inflammatory Bowel Disease IBD Diet for Crohn's and Colitis

How much upset milk can cause depends on the severity of your lactase deficiency. From 60 to 80 percent of those with lactose intolerance can still drink a single glass of milk without distress and about half can drink two glasses of milk, says note researcher Dr. Dennis Savaiano of the University of Minnesota. One study found that normal people absorbed 92% of lactose from milk; those with lactose intolerance absorbed only 25% to 58%.

Lactose Intolerance: The Yogurt Salvation

Yogurt is safe because it comes predigested. In one of nature's small miracles, the bacteria in yogurt take over for the missing enzyme and digest much of the milk sugar for you. According to tests by Dr. Savaiano, two bacterial cultures, *Streptococcus thermophilus* and especially *Lactobacillus bulgaricus*, that transform milk into yogurt gobble up much of milk's lactose during fermentation, and once in the intestine eat much of the remaining lactose. Be sure the yogurt has live bacterial cultures, as nearly all commercial yogurts do; killed bacteria do not work. Plain yogurts have more anti-lactose activity than flavored yogurts. Buttermilk and acidophilus milk, although fermented, still cause as much distress in most people as plain milk.

Beware of frozen yogurt. When yogurt is commercially frozen, it is sometimes repasteurized and this kills bacteria. Dr. Savaiano once tested all brands of frozen yogurts sold in Minneapolis and St. Paul. He found that "none had significant enzyme activity," and thus were worthless against lactose intolerance. Even though some frozen yogurt claimed to contain "live active cultures," there were not enough to do the job.

The Lactose Intolerance Test: How to tell if you are intolerant to cow's milk

If you suspect you may be lactose intolerant, stop drinking any milk or eating any dairy products for at least two weeks. Be sure to check processed foods for hidden sources of dairy products. Whey, for example, has more lactose than any other food and it is frequently added to processed foods. So is dry milk.

If you feel better - and the gastrointestinal symptoms have diminished - you can do a "challenge" or "reintroduction" test to try to determine how much of which dairy foods you need to avoid. Drink a little milk or eat a little cheese and wait for two or three days to see what happens. It may take that long for symptoms of lactose intolerance to show up, say experts.

Your physician can also give you more definitive tests to diagnose lactose intolerance, including blood tests and a simple breath-hydrogen test.

If you have Lactose Intolerance - What to Eat

The consequences are apt to be less if you:

- drink smaller quantities of milk at one time
- drink milk with meals
- try whole milk rather than skim milk
- stay away from buttermilk, acidophilus milk and frozen yogurt
- use Lactaid (an enzyme to help digest lactose in dairy) every time when you eat dairy.
- use special milk products such as Lacteeze or other "Lactose-free milk" in which the lactose is reduced. For infants with lactose intolerance, try Lactose-free formulas.
- try calcium-fortified soy milk to ensure adequate calcium intake
- also try calcium-fortified orange juice if you are concerned about calcium
- Read The Myth of Calcium Pills

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