



...because health matters!

Nutrition Matters

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Milk Matters

Most people enjoy milk and milk products throughout their lives, but some people find it difficult to digest these foods, especially as they become older. This happens when they have Lactose Intolerance. A better name for Lactose Intolerance is Lactose Maldigestion, because they do not digest lactose well.

What is Lactose Maldigestion?

People with lactose maldigestion cannot fully digest lactose, which is the sugar found in milk and milk products. Lactose is a natural part of the milk of all mammals, including goats' milk, human, and cows' milk. It is also added to many processed foods. Our bodies usually produce a substance called lactase, which digests lactose. People who do not have enough lactase to digest all the lactose in their food get stomach bloating, cramps, gas and/or diarrhea when they drink milk. These people are lactose maldigesters.

This conditions is not the same as a milk allergy. If you are allergic to milk, you should not have any milk or products made with milk. If you have lactose maldigestion you may be able to have some milk or milk products in your diet.

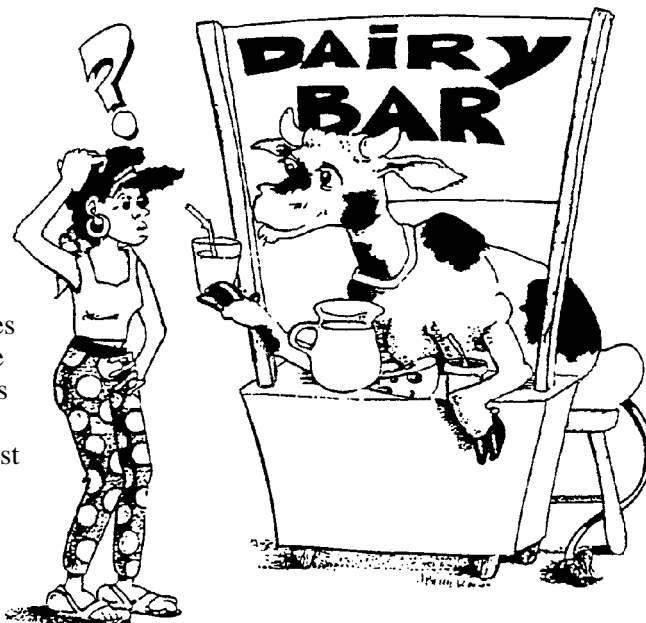
Tips for Maldigesters

Every lactose maldigester is different. The only way to know how much lactose you can tolerate is to experiment. It is rare to have to restrict all milk or milk products from your diet. It is also good to know that even though you cannot absorb and use the lactose in the products you eat, you can absorb the nutrients, such as

as calcium and vitamin D, just as well as those without the condition.

Here are a few steps to help you find out how much lactose you can tolerate.

- 1) Avoid as many lactose sources as possible, until your symptoms stop. In addition to milk and milk products, check for and avoid lactose in medications, and foods which contain milk solids or powder, whey, curds or cheese flavour.



Tips for Action

- Drink small amounts of milk, spread throughout the day, i.e. 1/4-1/2 cup (75-125 ml) servings.
- Drink milk with meals or snacks, not on an empty stomach.
- Drink chocolate or fuller-fat milks.
- Eat yogurts with live bacteria which help to digest the lactose.
- Eat hard aged cheeses; they have low levels of lactose.
- Drink lactose-reduced milks or add a lactase drops to regular milk before you drink it.
- Take lactase tablets before eating milk or milk products.

Definitions

Digest: The process of breaking down food, after eaten, into smaller parts so that it can be used by the body.

Lactose: The natural sugar in the milk and milk products of all mammals.

Lactase: A substance made by our bodies which digests lactose.

Lactose maldigestion: The incomplete digestion of lactose by people who do not have enough lactase. Symptoms may or may not occur.

Lactose intolerance: A condition where symptoms such as gas, bloating and diarrhea occur after a standard lactose tolerance test.

- 2) Gradually begin eating small amounts of foods containing lactose until your own personal level of tolerance is found. Yogurt and hard cheeses are usually well tolerated by lactose maldigesters, but fluid milk, including buttermilk and acidophilus milk, sour cream and soft or creamed cheese may not be. See "Tips for Action" for some more ideas on coping with lactose in your diet. Also check the "lactose steps" to see which foods are high in lactose.
- 3) If you must stay on a low lactose diet, get help from a dietitian to be sure you are getting all the nutrients you need.

Who has Lactose Maldigestion?

Lactose maldigestion is more common among adults of African, Asian, native North American or Oriental descent. The condition is rare in infants and less common in children than adults.

Some people can digest more lactose than others. Some people can digest a glass of milk without any difficulty, especially when consumed with a meal, whereas others can have symptoms of maldigestion with much smaller amounts of milk.

Causes of Lactose Maldigestion

There are two major causes:

1. It may be inherited, in which case it is permanent.
2. It may be temporary, following an illness or a bout of diarrhea or after taking certain medications (especially antibiotics). If it is temporary, the body will be able to digest lactose again after it recovers.

Am I a Lactose Maldigester?

If you think you might have lactose maldigestion, ask your doctor to order tests for an accurate diagnosis.

There are two common tests:

- 1) The lactose tolerance test is very commonly used. Because this test uses very large amounts of lactose it can make the problem appear to be worse than it is.



- 2) The breath hydrogen test is more accurate because it uses smaller amounts of lactose; that is, amounts which are closer to normal amounts eaten.

Milk matters, to adults as well as to children! So for taste and good nutrition, try to include milk and milk products in your daily diet. For advice to help you cope with lactose maldigestion, consult your local dietitian.

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For more information, contact a dietitian/nutritionist in your region. (Contact your local health department or provincial dietetic association for help.)

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