



# Lactose Intolerance

Living with lactose intolerance

This brochure is brought to you by **Healthy Appetite**, a program designed by **Cleveland Clinic and Heinen's** to provide shoppers with nutritional and educational information, so they can make healthier food and lifestyle choices – choices that will ultimately enhance personal health and wellness.

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Does drinking a glass of milk or eating a cup of ice cream leave you with cramps, diarrhea, gas or bloating? If you answered “yes,” then you may have a condition many Americans struggle with on a daily basis: lactose intolerance.

### **What is Lactose Intolerance?**

Lactose intolerance, also called lactase deficiency, means the body isn't able to fully digest the milk sugar (lactose) in dairy foods. The problem behind true lactose intolerance is a deficiency in lactase – an enzyme secreted from the walls of the small intestine that digests lactose. Without lactase, unprocessed lactose moves on to the colon, where it comes into contact with normal intestinal bacteria. The result is hallmark symptoms of lactose intolerance – gas, bloating and diarrhea.

**There are a number of ways you can develop lactose intolerance.** Below are the three most common reasons:

#### **1. Normal result of aging (primary lactose intolerance)**

The body normally produces large amounts of lactase during early childhood, when milk is the primary source of nutrition. As the diet becomes more varied and fewer dairy foods are introduced in the body, lactase production decreases. Think of it as a “use it or lose it” condition. In some people, this gradual decline results in symptoms of lactose intolerance.

**2. As a result of injury or illness (secondary lactose intolerance)** – This kind of lactose intolerance occurs when the small intestine produces less lactase as a result of injury, surgery or illness to the small intestine. Lactose intolerance may be a result of a bariatric procedure or illness such as inflammatory bowel disease, Crohn's or celiac disease. This type of lactose intolerance may be completely reversible in some people; for those with long-term illness, it may be permanent.

**3. Congenital lactose intolerance** – This rare condition occurs when both the mother and father pass on a defective form of a gene that creates lactose intolerance. With this condition, an infant is unable, from birth, to digest the lactose in the mother's breast milk and requires a lactose-free infant formula 2.5 grams of fiber per serving.



### **How is Lactose Intolerance Treated?**

Unfortunately, you cannot control how much lactase your body produces. But you can avoid the uncomfortable and sometimes painful symptoms of lactose intolerance by modifying your food choices.

If you have lactose intolerance, here are a few eating tips to consider:

- Even if you have true lactose intolerance, most researchers believe you should still be able to tolerate a small amount of dairy, such as one cup of milk.
- Since you are digesting other foods along with it, drinking milk with meals may reduce symptoms of lactose intolerance.
- Drink milk or dairy in small amounts (2-4 ounces) over the course of a day.
- Try having a lactase enzyme tablet or liquid every time you eat dairy. These over-the-counter products will help digest the lactose for you.
- Use special lactose-free or reduced-lactose dairy products, which may have lactose reduced by 99 percent. But read labels carefully to determine how much lactose has been reduced before you purchase.
- Try drinking calcium-fortified soy milk, rice milk, almond milk or orange juice, which are naturally lactose free but a good source of bone-building calcium.

- Enjoy dairy products that are naturally low in lactose, such as cheddar, Swiss or cottage cheese.
- Since they are cultured or fermented, yogurt, kefir and other dairy containing probiotics may be tolerated. During processing, these products naturally contain an enzyme that breaks down lactose. Try different brands to see which you can tolerate the best.
- Be on the lookout for “hidden” sources of lactose in non-dairy commercial foods. If the ingredients list includes any of the following, it contains lactose: whey, curds, milk by-products, non-fat dry milk powder, and dry milk solids.

Since everyone’s level of lactose intolerance is different, there’s no telling what food will or will not induce symptoms until you try it.

If you need ideas for getting more calcium in your diet, talk to your dietitian.

Although many people believe they have lactose intolerance, they don’t always have a deficiency in the lactase enzyme. On the other hand, some people who have a low level of lactase don’t necessarily have lactose intolerance. Only people with low lactase levels and symptoms are considered to have lactose intolerance.

The good news is that the uncomfortable symptoms of lactose intolerance can be avoided by making educated nutrition choices. And as long as overall food choices are sound, a person with lactose intolerance can reap the benefits of a healthy, nutrient rich diet just like the rest of us.



### **How Do I Know if I Have Lactose Intolerance?**

The symptoms of lactose intolerance usually begin 30 minutes to two hours after consuming foods with lactose. Common signs and symptoms of lactose intolerance include diarrhea, bloating, gas, abdominal cramps and nausea. Symptoms are usually mild, but can be severe for some people.

Since many conditions have symptoms similar to lactose intolerance, it’s important to check with your physician before self-diagnosing. Irritable bowel syndrome, stomach flu, or other conditions may be the culprit. Symptoms of lactose intolerance do not usually manifest until after age 5, so if your child is having similar symptoms, seek medical attention to ensure there aren’t any underlying health problems that need to be addressed. In addition, certain ethnicities are more prone to developing lactose intolerance. Lactose intolerance is more common in blacks, Hispanic, Asian and American Indian populations.



**Your doctor can perform a series of tests to determine if you have lactose intolerance:**

- The lactose tolerance test involves drinking a liquid that contains high levels of lactose. Your doctor will draw blood samples for a two-hour period following ingestion of the drink and will measure if your body has broken down the lactose.
- A hydrogen breath test also requires you to drink a liquid containing lactose. Following the test, your doctor will measure the amount of hydrogen in your breath. In normal instances, very little hydrogen is in your breath. If lactose is not digested properly it travels to the colon and ferments, causing hydrogen and other gases to be produced. These gasses eventually end up being exhaled.
- Infants and children suspected of having lactose intolerance will need to undergo a stool acidity test. Undigested lactose creates acids in the colon that can be measured in the stool and used to diagnose the condition.

**Here's to Your Good Health**

You can enjoy tremendous health benefits when you make small but significant changes in the way you eat. A great first step is to take advantage of the Healthy Appetite program, designed by Cleveland Clinic and Heinen's. For nutrition tips and meal ideas, please visit [www.heinens.com/healthyappetite](http://www.heinens.com/healthyappetite).

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