

Lactose intolerance

This resource is for people who are unable to digest (break down) lactose containing foods.

What is lactose?

Lactose is a type of sugar found in milk and other dairy products. It is also added to some processed and pre-prepared foods.

What is lactose intolerance?

- Lactase is made by the body to break down lactose in your food.
- Lactose intolerance occurs when your body does not make enough **lactase**.
- The treatment for lactose intolerance is choosing a low lactose diet.

The length of time you need a low-lactose diet will depend on why you have lactose intolerance.

Why do I have lactose intolerance?

- Lactose intolerance can occur at any age and may be life-long or temporary.
- Lactose intolerance can occur due to several reasons:
 - Gastrointestinal conditions/surgeries
 - Infection
 - Cancer treatments
 - Not consuming dairy or milk-based products for long periods of time.

Symptoms of lactose intolerance include:

- Diarrhoea
- Bloating
- Stomach pain or cramps
- Excessive wind
- Urgency to go to the toilet

What can I eat if I have lactose intolerance?

- Most people with lactose intolerance can have some lactose in their diet. This varies from person to person.
- Spread lactose containing food and drinks throughout the day.
- Choose lactose free or alternative (e.g. soy, almond, rice) milk and dairy products.
- Check food/drink labels to identify any added milk or milk products. Milk proteins, including casein and whey, contain minimal lactose.
- Continue to make your favourite recipes by swapping for low or lactose free products.
- You can find lactase enzyme products (e.g. Lacteeze, Lacto-Free) in the form of tablets or drops at most pharmacies. You can add these to or take them with lactose containing foods. Discuss this with your pharmacist.

The table below shows you the foods that are high in lactose (you will have trouble digesting) and low in lactose (that you will be able to digest more easily).

High lactose (limit/avoid)	Low or no lactose
Cow's milk	Lactose free milk
Goat's milk	Alternative milk products e.g. soy milk, almond milk, rice milk or oat milk (choose products with 100 mg per calcium per 100 mL)
Flavoured milk	Lactose free yoghurt*
Milk based drinks e.g. smoothies or iced coffees	Lactose free ice cream or custard
Ice cream	Hard/matured cheeses e.g. cheddar, parmesan, feta or Swiss
Dairy desserts e.g. cheesecake, custards, trifle	Dark chocolate
Soft cheeses e.g. cottage cheese, ricotta, Camembert, Brie	
Dishes that contain dairy based sauces e.g. tuna mornay, frittata, scrambled eggs, quiche, lasagne, cauliflower in white sauce, potato bake	*Some yoghurts with lactose may be well tolerated, as the bacterial cultures help to break down the lactose.
Milk or white chocolate	

How can I get enough calcium if I have lactose intolerance?

- People with lactose intolerance may be at risk of not getting enough calcium.
- Calcium is important for bone health and is found in many lactose containing foods and drinks. If you do not get enough calcium, your bones can become weak and are more likely to break. This is called osteoporosis.
- Choose lactose-free milk and dairy products and other calcium-rich non-dairy foods. If you choose non-dairy products aim for at least 100 mg calcium per 100 mL when reading the nutrition information panel.
- Have 2-3 serves of dairy/dairy alternatives per day. This may be different depending on your age, gender or life stage.

An example of 1 serve of dairy/dairy alternatives is:

- 2 slices (40g) hard cheese
- 1 cup (250 mL) soy milk fortified with calcium or lactose-free milk
- ¾ cup (200g) yoghurt or soy yoghurt fortified with calcium

Other foods that contain calcium are:

- ½ cup (100g) fish with edible bones e.g. canned salmon or sardines*
- 100g firm tofu made with calcium*
- Nuts and seeds e.g. almonds, sesame seeds, tahini paste
- Foods with added calcium e.g. breakfast cereal or breads
- Green leafy vegetables e.g. bok choy, broccoli, spinach
- Baked beans and legumes e.g. kidney beans

* These are the best non-dairy sources of calcium. They provide the same amount of calcium as 1 serve of dairy.

For more information on calcium visit the Osteoporosis Australia website:

<https://www.osteoporosis.org.au/calcium>

Summary

- People with lactose intolerance can tolerate some lactose in their diet. This varies from person to person.
- If you have lactose intolerance, you may be at risk of not getting enough calcium. Choose lactose-free milk and dairy products and other high calcium non-dairy foods.
- If you have experienced changes in your tolerance to lactose containing foods, remember that this may be temporary.

For further information, contact your dietitian or nutritionist: _____