



## Lactose Intolerant?

### What is lactose intolerance?

Lactose intolerance means the body cannot easily digest lactose, a type of natural sugar found in milk and dairy products.

When lactose moves through the large intestine (colon) without being properly digested, it can cause uncomfortable symptoms such as gas, belly pain, and bloating. Some people with lactose intolerance cannot digest any milk products. Others can eat or drink small amounts of milk products or certain types of milk products without problems.

People who are lactose-intolerant have to learn how to eat to avoid discomfort and to get enough calcium for healthy bones.

### What causes lactose intolerance?

Lactose intolerance occurs when the small intestine does not make enough of an enzyme called lactase. Your body needs lactase to break down, or digest, lactose.

Lactose intolerance most commonly runs in families, and symptoms usually develop during the teen or adult years. Most people with this type of lactose intolerance can eat some milk or dairy products without problems.

In rare cases, newborns are lactose-intolerant. A person born with lactose intolerance cannot eat or drink anything with lactose.

Some premature babies have temporary lactose intolerance because they are not yet able to make lactase. After a baby begins to make lactase, the condition typically goes away.

### What are the symptoms?

Symptoms of lactose intolerance can be mild to severe, depending on how much lactase your body makes. Symptoms usually begin 30 minutes to 2 hours after you eat or drink milk products. If you have lactose intolerance, your symptoms may include:

- Bloating.
- Pain or cramps.
- Gurgling or rumbling sounds in your belly.
- Gas.
- Loose stools or diarrhea.
- Throwing up.

Many people who have gas, belly pain, bloating, and diarrhea suspect they may be lactose-intolerant. The best way to check this is to avoid eating all milk and dairy products to see if your symptoms go away. If they do, then you can try adding small amounts of milk products to see if your symptoms come back.

If you feel sick after drinking a glass of milk one time, you probably do not have lactose intolerance. But if you feel sick every time you have milk, ice cream, or another dairy product, you may have lactose intolerance.

If you think you might have lactose intolerance, talk with your doctor. He or she can make sure that your symptoms are caused by lactose intolerance and not by another problem.

**If you would like more information, please contact  
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