



GOOD HEALTH AND NUTRITION

LACTOSE INTOLERANCE



Lactose intolerance

People with lactose intolerance experience symptoms such as diarrhoea, abdominal pain, flatulence and/or bloating after consuming lactose. Lactose intolerance is mostly a deficiency, not an absence of the enzyme lactase. These symptoms occur because the body does not fully digest lactose, a type of sugar that is naturally present in milk and other dairy foods.

How do I know if I have lactose intolerance?

As lactose intolerance is sometimes confused with other medical problems, such as irritable bowel syndrome (IBS), it is best to get a proper diagnosis from a health professional. Although self-diagnosis is common, it is not a good idea as it can lead to some people needlessly missing out on the important nutrients provided by milk and other dairy foods.

How common is lactose intolerance?

It is estimated that only one in 20 Caucasians have some degree of lactose intolerance. Lactose intolerance is more common among Australian Aborigines and people from Asia, Africa, the Middle East and some Mediterranean countries.

Lactose intolerance can also be caused by some illnesses, such as gastroenteritis (gastro), which temporarily reduce the body's ability to digest lactose. When this occurs, a low lactose diet may be recommended for a few weeks by your health professional before reintroducing lactose containing foods.

TIP



While dairy foods do not need to be eliminated from your diet if you are lactose intolerant, the amount of lactose that can be tolerated will vary from person to person. Check ingredient lists on foods and pharmaceutical products for the presence of lactose.

What do you do if you are diagnosed with lactose intolerance?

Among people diagnosed with lactose intolerance, there are big differences in the amount of lactose that can be consumed without symptoms developing. There is no need to cut out all dairy foods from the diet but rather adjust lactose intake according to tolerance.

According to the Australian Dietary Guidelines, people with lactose intolerance can tolerate up to 250ml (one glass) of milk each day if it is consumed in small amounts throughout the day and consumed with other foods.

People with lactose intolerance can generally eat cheese, as most types of cheese are very low in lactose. Yoghurt is also generally well digested as the bacteria in yoghurt helps break down the lactose.

The following table lists the lactose content of various dairy foods.

Dairy food	Lactose content (g)
Parmesan cheese, 40g	0.0
Cheddar cheese, 40g	0.04
Swiss style cheese, 40g	0.04
Camembert, 40g	0.04
Cream cheese, 22g	0.55
Cream, 20g (1 tblspn)	0.6
Ice cream, 50g	1.65
Ricotta cheese, 120g	2.4
Yoghurt (natural), 200g	10.0*
Regular milk, 250ml	15.75

**The lactose content in yoghurt decreases each day, even while it sits in the fridge, because its natural bacteria uses lactose for energy.*

Why are dairy foods important?

Dairy foods such as milk, cheese and yoghurt are important for good nutrition throughout childhood and adulthood. While milk, cheese and yoghurt are an excellent source of calcium they also provide other essential nutrients including potassium, phosphorus, magnesium, protein, vitamin A, riboflavin, vitamin B12 and zinc.

According to the Australian Dietary Guidelines, consumption of milk, cheese and yoghurt can help protect against heart disease and stroke, and can help reduce the risk of high blood pressure and some cancers; may reduce the risk of type 2 diabetes; and may contribute to stronger bones.

MOST AUSTRALIANS DON'T CONSUME ENOUGH OF THE MILK, CHEESE, YOGHURT AND/OR ALTERNATIVES FOOD GROUP SO ARE MISSING OUT ON THE NUMEROUS HEALTH BENEFITS LINKED WITH THESE FOODS.

Use the tables below to work out how many serves from the dairy food group are needed each day.

Minimum recommended number of serves from the dairy food group

	Age (years)	No. of serves per day
Men	19-70	2 ½
	70+	3 ½
Women	19-50	2 ½
	50+	4
	Pregnant or breast feeding	2 ½
Boys	2-3	1 ½
	4-8	2
	9-11	2 ½
	12-18	3 ½
Girls	2-3	1 ½
	4-8	1 ½
	9-11	3
	12-18	3 ½

*Adapted from: 2013 Australian Dietary Guidelines. The dairy food group includes milk, cheese, yoghurt and/or alternatives.**



*Alternatives include: 250ml soy, rice or other cereal drink with at least 100mg of added calcium per 100ml.

For recipes and ideas on how to include adequate serves of dairy foods in your healthy eating plan visit dairy.com.au/health

TO HELP YOU INCLUDE DAIRY FOODS IN YOUR DIET EVERY DAY:

Drink milk with other foods rather than on an empty stomach.

Spread out your milk consumption across the day, rather than having it all at once.

Build up your tolerance by starting with small amounts of milk then gradually increasing your intake.

Yoghurt is often better tolerated than milk.

Most hard cheeses are low in lactose and are well tolerated.

If you still have problems, try low-lactose milk or yoghurt or a lactose digesting preparation (available from chemists).

For more information, contact an Accredited Practising Dietitian.