

“WHAT IS LACTOSE INTOLERANCE?”



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Lactose Intolerance is the inability to digest significant amounts of lactose, which is found in many foods and dairy products. 75% of the population worldwide and 25% of American adults are considered lactose intolerant.

What causes lactose intolerance? It is due to a deficiency in the enzyme lactase that is found in the intestinal wall. It is responsible for breaking lactose, which is unabsorbed sugar, into two other sugars-glucose and galactose - that can be absorbed. When there is a deficiency in the enzyme lactase, the unabsorbed sugar lactose draws fluid into the lumen of the intestine.

There are four different types of lactase deficiency. The most common type is primary (adult type) lactase deficiency which is characterized by low lactase activity. Symptoms can arise in childhood, but the peak of onset of symptoms occurs in adolescence and early adulthood.

The clinical features of lactose intolerance include watery diarrhea, abdominal bloating, crampy abdominal pain, and passing excessive gas. Some individuals experience abdominal fullness, nausea, and very loud bowel sounds. Stools can be bulky, frothy, and watery. Symptoms can begin as early as 30 minutes after ingestion of lactose to 12 hours

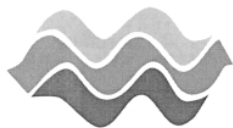
after ingestion. Lactose maldigestion may produce depression, osteoporosis, and infertility in adults, and recurrent abdominal pain in children.

Treatment of lactose intolerance is dietary adjustment. Most people can tolerate up to 240 ml of milk per day, which is equivalent to approximately 1 cup or 8 fluid ounces. Some people have improvement of their lactose intolerance symptoms with continued exposure to dairy products over time. But most people have to avoid lactose - containing foods, drinks, and prescription medications that use lactose as a carrier. There are many lactose-free milk preparations such as Lactaid now widely available. Lactose is not only found in dairy products such as cheese and milk. There are also a lot of hidden sources of lactose, so it is very important to read labels. Foods that have hidden lactose include: breads, baked goods, processed breakfast cereals, instant potatoes/soups/breakfast drinks, margarine, nonkosher lunch meat, salad dressings, candies/processed snacks, pancake/biscuit/cookie mixes.

Tablets and capsules containing lactose-digesting enzyme can also be taken 30 minutes prior to the ingestion of lactose - containing products. But keep in mind, the tablets or capsules may not provide enough enzyme to digest all of the lactose containing food, and therefore symptoms may occur. And most importantly, lactose intolerant persons must receive calcium supplementation.

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