

## A Lactose Intolerance Guide to Milk Products

### What is Lactose Intolerance?

Milk contains a natural sugar called lactose. People who have *lactose intolerance* don't produce enough lactase (an enzyme) in their digestive tract to digest large amounts of lactose at a time. When quantities of lactose exceed their ability to digest it, the result can be symptoms like gas, bloating and cramps.

**Lactose intolerance is not a food allergy.** In fact, most individuals with lactose intolerance can still enjoy milk products. After all, humans lack the enzyme needed to digest complex sugars in beans and we can still eat them. Read on for information and tips to help you get around your symptoms.

### The Importance of a Medical Diagnosis

We hear so much about lactose intolerance that people have a tendency to assume their digestive symptoms are due to lactose intolerance. Symptoms that many people attribute to a difficulty digesting milk products often turn out to be caused by something else. For example, other health problems (such as celiac disease) or some medications can produce symptoms that are similar to lactose intolerance. So can eating foods like cabbage, broccoli and beans. If you think you have lactose intolerance talk to your doctor. Lactose intolerance is diagnosed with a special test called the *hydrogen breath test*.

### You Don't Have to Give Up Milk Products

In most cases, eliminating milk products from your diet is not necessary. Milk products contain many nutrients that are important to our health. Following a few simple strategies allows most people to consume the daily *Food Guide Servings* of milk products recommended in *Canada's Food Guide*, symptom free.

### First, Find Your Degree of Tolerance

The digestive system of people with lactose intolerance still produces some lactase, which means that they can digest some lactose. The key is to find your level of tolerance. Experiment by consuming small quantities of milk products at a time and gradually increase the amount to see if you feel any symptoms. Then you can know how much and what kinds of milk products you can consume enjoyably.

### Spread Your Milk Products Throughout the Day

For strong healthy bones, adults need 1000 to 1200 mg of calcium a day, depending on their age. The *Easy Milk Product Menu* shows a day's example of how to eat milk products that is usually easy to tolerate. You'll see that consuming milk products with other foods improves tolerance. The suggested menu gives you about 900 mg of calcium. The rest of your diet, if it follows *Canada's Food Guide*, gives you about 300 mg.

#### Easy Milk Product Menu

| Suggestion                                                              | Amount of Milk Product |
|-------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------|
| Breakfast                                                               |                        |
| Milk with cereal                                                        | ½ cup / 125 mL         |
| Lunch                                                                   |                        |
| Slices of cheese in sandwich, or<br>cheese sprinkled over salad or soup | 2 oz. / 50 g           |
| Dinner                                                                  |                        |
| Small glass of milk or ice milk for dessert                             | ½ cup / 125 mL         |
| Snack                                                                   |                        |
| Yogurt                                                                  | ¾ cup / 175 g          |

## Tips for Tolerance

- Eat yogurt. It contains live bacteria that help break down lactose and is usually tolerated even by people who suffer from severe lactose intolerance.
- Try Mozzarella and aged cheeses like Cheddar, Swiss, Blue and Brie, etc. They contain almost no lactose.
- Have milk with meals or with other foods, not by itself on an empty stomach.
- Drink milk in several small servings throughout the day, instead of drinking a whole glass at one time.
- Reach for chocolate milk. It seems to be better tolerated than regular milk.
- Use milk products in recipes with other ingredients.
- Opt for special, lactose-reduced milks, or use lactose drops or tablets.

## Flash Facts

1. Research shows that many people clinically diagnosed as lactose intolerant report having no problems digesting two to four *Food Guide Servings* of milk products a day.
2. The tendency towards lactose intolerance or intolerance is inherited.
3. Many people can build a normal lactose intolerance to lactose by eating milk products a little at a time.
4. Temporary lactose intolerance can be a side effect of things like stomach flu, medications and food poisoning. When the condition passes or the medication is terminated, the intolerance goes away.
5. The ability to digest lactose often increases during pregnancy.

## The More Milk You Drink, the More You Can Drink

Studies show that the more milk you drink, the less lactose intolerant you can become. Most people with lactose intolerance can recondition their digestive systems to accept milk products, without discomfort, by drinking small quantities of milk at a time, for a period of a few weeks, then slowly

increasing the amounts. Try it – you'll find the results really worthwhile.

## To Build Your Tolerance, Try Drinking:

¼ cup (60 mL) to ½ cup (125 mL) of milk with meals, 2 to 3 times a day for 3 to 4 weeks. Then gradually increase the amount.

## What the Research Shows

Studies published in respected journals show that the majority of adults diagnosed with lactose intolerance can drink milk. Most people can tolerate 2 glasses (2 cups/500 mL) of milk a day with food, at separate meals, e.g. a glass of milk with breakfast and a glass of milk with dinner. Even the severely intolerant are usually okay with half a glass (½ cup/125 mL) of milk at a time, with a meal.

## Full of Good Stuff

Milk products are an important part of a balanced diet. They supply more than 15 vitamins and minerals essential to good health, and are an abundant natural source of calcium that our bodies absorb well.

## Why Not Just Take a Nutritional Supplement?

Food is complex. No vitamin or mineral supplement can duplicate the balance of nutrients and other unique beneficial substances found in milk products.

## People Who Don't Consume Milk Products:

- Are at greater risk for Osteoporosis (brittle bone disease)
- Are at greater risk for high blood pressure
- May be more susceptible to some cancers
- Risk deficiencies in essential nutrients such as calcium, vitamin D, riboflavin and vitamin B12

## Note on Label Reading

Lactose can be found in prepared foods or in some medications. Milk powder, milk solids, whey and lactoserum on an ingredient list, signal the presence of lactose. However the amount of lactose found in processed foods is usually not large enough to cause a problem. If you are

concerned about the lactose content of a medication, talk to your pharmacist.

**Canada's Food Guide Recommends 2- 4 Food Guide Servings of Milk and Alternatives a day**

One *Food Guide Serving* is:

- 1 cup/250 mL milk, chocolate milk or yogurt drink
- 2 oz./50 g cheese (the size of a small deck of cards)
- $\frac{3}{4}$  cup yogurt (175 g container)
- $\frac{3}{4}$  cup Kefir (175 g)

**Last Advice: If Nothing Works for You**

If you still have problems digesting milk products after following our tips, see a registered dietitian. She or he will help you plan a diet that avoids nutrient deficiencies if you find that you can't eat milk products.

Source: Dairy Farmers of Ontario, 2002