

# Is dairy scary?

## Eating right with lactose intolerance

Does dairy bother your belly? Millions of people have lactose intolerance, or the inability to fully digest lactose. Lactose is a natural sugar found in dairy products like milk, cheese and ice cream. When lactose isn't properly digested, it leads to digestive problems.



### **Symptoms of lactose intolerance**

A person who has lactose intolerance may notice one or more of these signs after eating dairy products:

- Bloating, swelling of the abdomen
- Stomach ache
- Cramps
- Diarrhea
- Nausea
- Gas

Some people notice the symptoms within minutes, while others don't notice it until a few hours later.

### **Different levels of intolerance**

The level of intolerance can vary widely from person to person. Some people can eat small amounts of dairy without a problem. For instance, they may be able to eat a piece of cheddar cheese or a serving of yogurt. Others, however, notice bloating and discomfort when they drink a few sips of milk.

Finding out your tolerance level can be a bit of trial and error. If you notice symptoms after eating two pieces of pizza with cheese, for instance, try a smaller serving next time until you don't notice any problems.

### **Can I still eat dairy?**

Many people with lactose intolerance can still eat dairy.

- **Start with small amounts.** Many people can tolerate dairy if they eat small portions and gradually increase amounts.
- **Eat dairy only with meals.** Eat dairy only with other foods to help it digest.
- **Choose lactose-free milk.** Many lactose-free milk and ice cream products can be found in grocery stores.
- **Consider lactase supplements.** The enzyme lactase helps digest lactose. Ask a doctor before using these. They may not be safe for everyone, including small children.

### **Talk to a doctor or dietitian**

If you have ongoing stomach pain or diarrhea, talk to your doctor. If you aren't eating any dairy products, ask about seeing a dietitian who can give you diet advice to get the nutrients your body needs, especially calcium and vitamin D.



*Sources: American College of Gastroenterology, National Institutes of Diabetes and Digestive and Kidney Diseases*