

# LACTOSE INTOLERANCE

(Milk Intolerance; Lactase Deficiency)



## BASIC INFORMATION

### DESCRIPTION

Difficulty digesting cow's milk. Lactose is the primary sugar in milk. Lactose intolerance occurs with varying severity in 75% of the black population, 90% of Asians or American Indians, and less than 20% of Caucasians of northwest European origin. It is not contagious or cancerous.

### FREQUENT SIGNS AND SYMPTOMS

In children:

- Foamy diarrhea with diaper rash.
- Vomiting (sometimes).
- Slow weight gain, growth and development.

In adults:

- Rumbling abdominal sounds, abdominal cramps and diarrhea.
- Gas and bloating.
- Nausea.

### CAUSES

- Deficiency or absence of the enzyme lactase. Lactase is necessary to digest all milk except mother's milk. Without it, sugars in milk absorb fluid and cause diarrhea. Although some infants are born with the disorder, lactose intolerance usually develops in adulthood.
- Temporary lactose intolerance can occur in an infant after a severe bout of gastroenteritis that damages the intestinal lining.

### RISK INCREASES WITH

Family history of lactase enzyme deficiency.

### PREVENTIVE MEASURES

Cannot be prevented at present. If you are pregnant and there is a history of lactose intolerance in your family, consider breast-feeding your baby. If not, you may need an alternative non-milk formula.

### EXPECTED OUTCOMES

This condition is currently considered incurable. However, symptoms can be relieved or controlled. Symptoms worsen at times for unexplained reasons.

### POSSIBLE COMPLICATIONS

Calcium deficiency (rare).



## TREATMENT

### GENERAL MEASURES

- Diagnostic tests may include culture of stool, lactose breath hydrogen test, lactose absorption test and rarely, small bowel biopsy.
- Symptoms can be controlled by diet restrictions or use of lactase products.

### MEDICATIONS

- A supplement to neutralize lactose in milk. The enzyme lactase is available without a prescription to be added to milk and milk products, or products are available that have the enzyme added already.
- Calcium supplements may be recommended.

### ACTIVITY

No restrictions.

### DIET

- If the condition is present at birth, an infant formula that contains little or no lactose, such as a soybean-based formula, will be recommended.
- If the lactose intolerance is temporary and caused by gastroenteritis, the substitute formula should be necessary for a short time only. Cow's milk can be introduced again later.
- Older persons with lactose intolerance should reduce or restrict milk and milk products, such as cheese and ice cream. Some patients tolerate whole milk or chocolate milk better than skim.
- Yogurt and fermented products such as hard cheese are better tolerated than milk.
- Read labels on food products. Milk sugar is used in many and may cause symptoms.



## NOTIFY OUR OFFICE IF

- You or your child has symptoms of lactose intolerance.
- Temperature rises to 101° F (38.3° C) or higher.
- Your infant fails to gain weight.
- Your infant refuses food or formula.
- Vomiting or diarrhea reappears in a child who has previously had a temporary intolerance to milk or milk products.
- A milk-free diet doesn't relieve symptoms.