



## Learn to Detect “Hidden” Lactose

Lactose intolerance, a condition that affects more than 30 million Americans, develops in people who are deficient in the enzyme lactase. The deficiency causes gastrointestinal problems after they consume foods containing lactose—primarily found in milk and milk products. In people without the deficiency, lactase helps break down lactose into two simple forms of sugar that are easily absorbed by the body.

Often lactose intolerance is diagnosed when a person is young, typically by the age of five. However, the condition also can develop in older age. It's not unusual for people who have enjoyed milk and ice cream for years to find themselves experiencing the common signs of lactose intolerance—abdominal pain, diarrhea, bloating, gas and nausea—immediately after consuming those same foods.

If you find yourself among the millions estimated to be lactose intolerant, it's important to know that lactose can be found in many less obvious, non-dairy foods, says Weill Cornell clinical dietitian Alissa Rumsey, RD, CDN.



*Aside from the obvious milk-based dairy foods, lactose can be found in foods ranging from instant pancakes and frozen waffles to processed meats, certain breads, salad dressings and many snack chips.*

“Milk, lactose, whey, curds, milk byproducts, dry milk solids, butter-milk, and non-fat dry milk powder all can indicate that a product contains lactose,” she says. “Milk and milk products are often added to processed foods, so people with lactose intolerance should be aware of food products that may contain even small amounts of lactose. These include certain breads and other baked goods, frozen waffles and pancakes, instant potatoes, certain soups, potato chips, processed meats (bacon, sausage,

hot dogs, and lunch meat), salad dressing, and margarine, among others.”

### Your tolerance level.

Rumsey explains that lactose intolerance can range from mild to severe. You may have a mild upset stomach after a large glass of milk, while someone else with the condition may be in real pain. Similarly, a product with only a small amount of milk or milk product may be eaten without a problem by some lactose-intolerant patients, while others may be sensitive to even the slightest amount of lactose in their foods.

“People with lactose intolerance vary in their ability to tolerate certain amounts of lactose, so they may not have to completely avoid dairy foods,” Rumsey says. “Many people are also able to consume yogurt and hard cheeses, which have lower levels of lactose than regular milk, with no symptoms. You may also be able to increase your



### SOURCES OF LACTOSE

Milk isn't the only ingredient you need to watch out for if you're lactose intolerant. Read the labels of non-dairy products carefully and look for these ingredients, which contain lactose:

Whey	Cheese	Whey protein concentrate	Buttermilk
Curds	Malted milk	Milk byproducts	Sweet cream
Dry milk solids	Sour cream	Non-fat dry milk powder	Nougat
Butter	Casein	Margarine	Caseinates

## ... Hidden Lactose, p2

tolerance to dairy products by gradually introducing them into your diet.”

There may be a little trial and error at first to determine your tolerance level, but for many patients, the best advice is to avoid lactose altogether.

**Food options.** A growing number of products on grocery store shelves are options for lactose-intolerant consumers. “Lactose-free and lactose-reduced milk and milk products are identical to regular milk, except they have the enzyme lactase added to them,” Rumsey says. “Yogurt made with active and live bacterial cultures can be better tolerated than yogurt without live cultures, since the bacteria helps to convert lactose to lactic acid in the intestine, thereby giving it a lower lactose content.” (Frozen yogurt does not contain bacterial cultures, she adds.)

You may find that soy milk, which is a good source of calcium, can replace the milk you pour on breakfast cereal or drink by the glass. You also can use soy milk in place of cow’s milk in

baked goods and other recipes.

Because many lactose-intolerant people can handle small amounts of lactose at one time without any gastrointestinal problems, consider drinking smaller glasses of milk (two to four ounces instead of eight), but more often, throughout the day.

If you’re concerned about calcium intake, Rumsey notes that plenty of other foods can fill in the gap left by traditional dairy products. These include broccoli, leafy greens, oranges, tofu, and calcium-fortified breads and juices. Your doctor also may suggest a calcium supplement, particularly if you are at higher risk for conditions such as osteoporosis or fractures due to diminishing bone density.

Finally, if you wish to continue eating or drinking products with lactose, consider taking lactase supplements such as Lactaid or Dairy-Ease, which you take when you



### WHAT YOU CAN DO

*If you are lactose intolerant:*

- Experiment with a variety of dairy products, such as hard cheeses like Swiss and cheddar, that have low lactose levels.
- Save milk for mealtimes when the digestive process is slower, reducing the odds of experiencing symptoms.
- Talk with your doctor about probiotics, living organisms in your intestines that help maintain healthy digestion. They can be found in foods such as some yogurts and also in capsule form.

consume products with lactose. Their effectiveness varies from person to person, but it’s worth talking with your doctor about these supplements. And if diarrhea is a common response after you consume any lactose, have an antidiarrheal agent on hand, like loperamide (Imodium A-D), to help relieve your symptoms. 🍌