



Associated conditions

Coeliac disease and lactose intolerance

What is lactose intolerance?

Lactose is a type of sugar found in milk from animals (cow, sheep and goat). Lactose intolerance is caused by a deficiency of lactase, an enzyme which is found in the lining of the gut. You need this enzyme to absorb and digest lactose. If lactose is undigested it will cause you uncomfortable gut symptoms. Lactose intolerance is different to a milk allergy which is caused by the protein in milk, not the sugar.

What are the symptoms?

Symptoms of lactose intolerance are similar to symptoms of coeliac disease and include:

- bloating
- stomach pain and/or cramps
- diarrhoea
- flatulence
- nausea.

Why is lactose intolerance associated with coeliac disease?

Coeliac disease damages the part of the gut where lactase is produced. If the body doesn't make enough lactase, or the enzyme that is made doesn't work properly, then this can cause gut symptoms.

Once on a gluten-free diet your gut will begin to heal and you will start to digest lactose again.

Lactose intolerance is usually temporary. Following a gluten-free diet allows the gut to heal and lactose digestion will usually return to normal.

What should I do if I think I have lactose intolerance?

The first step is to speak to your GP or dietitian. It is important that you don't cut out lactose from your diet until you have spoken to your healthcare professional.

To find out if you have lactose intolerance your GP or dietitian may suggest that you totally exclude all foods that contain lactose from your diet. Your symptoms should improve within a few days. You can then gradually increase the amount you eat until your symptoms appear, then stick to having just below this amount in your diet. Your dietitian can supervise this and make sure you are not missing out on important nutrients which you would usually get from milk and other dairy foods.



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Diet tips for managing lactose intolerance and coeliac disease

People with lactose intolerance can usually have some lactose in their diet. In fact, eating some lactose can actually help your body become more tolerant to it.

The amount of lactose you can eat without getting symptoms varies from person to person, so you will need to have specific advice and monitoring from a dietitian.

Try these

- Choosing food and drink fortified with calcium is important. Soya and rice milks* are lactose free.
- Milk which has been treated to reduce the amount of lactose is available from supermarkets.
- Although made from milk, yoghurts and cheeses (hard and soft) are very low in lactose and can be eaten by most people with lactose intolerance.
- All butter and some margarines are lactose-free.
- Combining milk with other foods may help your body to digest lactose, such as adding milk to mashed potato.
- Gluten-free foods can sometimes contain milk as an ingredient. Most people with lactose intolerance do not need to avoid these foods. If you are concerned, contact the gluten-free manufacturer directly about ingredients in their specific products.

Calcium

People with coeliac disease are at risk of developing osteoporosis, so it is important to have a gluten-free diet that is rich in calcium to help keep your bones strong. You can find calcium in non dairy foods including:

Food per serving	Amount
Calcium enriched milk alternative eg soya/almond milk*, 200ml	240mg
Tinned sardines with bones, ½ can drained (42g)	230mg
Sesame seeds, 2 teaspoons	170mg
Pot of soya yoghurt, 100g	120mg
Kale, 3 tablespoons (80g)	120mg
Baked beans*, ½ tin	105mg
Kidney beans, 120g	85mg
Dried figs, 30g	75mg
1 orange	70mg
Almonds, 30g	70mg
Gluten-free bread*, 2 slices	70mg
Broccoli, 3 tablespoons (80g)	32mg
Dried apricots, 30g	30mg

***Check your Food and Drink Directory for suitable products.**

See our Osteoporosis leaflet and Calcium leaflet for more information.

This information is for guidance only and should not replace advice given by your healthcare professional.

www.coeliac.org.uk



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