

Dietary advice for lactose intolerance in children

Nutrition and Dietetics

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Information for Parents and Carers

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Introduction

Lactose is the sugar found in milk and dairy products. Lactase is an enzyme that breaks down lactose. Your body can then use it for energy. When lactose is not broken down properly, it turns into gas in the tummy. This can cause watery poo, bloating, tummy pain, wind, and make you feel sick. Babies may also have sore skin around the nappy area.

What causes lactose intolerance?

1. Genetic (it runs in the family) low levels of the lactase enzyme. This is rare.
2. Gut damage or inflammation. This is the most common reason in children. It can be because they have recently had a stomach bug (gastroenteritis), or been on antibiotics.

The lactase enzyme is found in the gut. So if the gut is damaged, the enzyme can be lost. The diet will only need to be followed for 1 to 3 months, until the gut recovers.

What is a low lactose diet?

If your child's doctor or dietitian thinks they have lactose intolerance, they may ask for them to eat less lactose, to see if symptoms improve. Those with lactose intolerance can eat a small amount of lactose without symptoms. This leaflet is a guide for parents and carers of children with lactose intolerance.

When to get more advice?

If reducing lactose does not ease your child's symptoms, speak to your doctor or dietitian. They may need to do more investigations to find out what is wrong. Lactose intolerance can be linked to other conditions, such as Coeliac disease.

This leaflet is not suitable for those with a milk allergy or congenital lactase deficiency.

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Nutrition on a low lactose diet

Dairy products are a good source of nutrients such as calcium, protein, iodine and vitamin B12.

- Low-lactose milks and yoghurts often have similar nutrients to standard dairy products.
- Plant-based alternatives to dairy products can have these vitamins added. Try not to buy products described as “organic”. These do not have the vitamins or minerals added. Rice milk is not suitable for children under 4 1/2 years of age.

You can still get the nutrition you need from eating a balanced diet, which is lactose free.

- Calcium rich foods include tinned fish, green vegetables, pulses, seeds and fortified cereals.
- See our leaflet ‘Calcium advice for children on a dairy-free diet’ for more information.

Reading food labels

By law, pre-packaged foods must be labeled with all of their ingredients. Read the label. Your child should not eat foods with ingredient labels that say:

- Milk (including from cow’s, goats and sheep).
- Milk solids, non-fat milk solids or separate milk solids.
- Skimmed milk powder.
- Lactose or milk sugar.
- Cream or yoghurt.

If a food has **none of these ingredients**, it will be **lactose-free**. Lactose-free foods can be enjoyed freely, as part of your child’s balanced diet. Vegan foods are lactose-free. If a food does contain one of the above ingredients, your child may still be able to have it, in small amounts.

“May contain” labels

Children with lactose intolerance can have foods that “may contain milk” or “made in a factory that handles milk”.

- Remember: ingredients change. Different brands use different ingredients. Always check the label of the food you are offering to your child.
- When eating out, it may be easier to tell the restaurant that your child is dairy-free.

This table is a guide, **not** a full list. Speak to your dietitian if you have any more questions.

	High lactose (Do not eat)	Low lactose & Lactose-free (Can eat)
Milk	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Cow, sheep or goat's milk • Condensed milk • Evaporated milk • Dried milk powder • Infant formula 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Some specialist infant formulas (refer to your Dietitian's advice) • Lactose free milk • Plant-based milk (such as oat, soy, almond, coconut, rice, pea, hemp, nut milk)
Dairy products	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Cream or long-life (such as Elmea) • Yoghurts / Lassi • Fromage frais 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • LactoFree cream • Lactose free yoghurt • Plant-based cream (such as soy or oat cream) • Butter / Ghee / Vegetable spread
Cheese	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Cottage cheese • Processed cheese • Cheese spread • Ricotta / Mascarpone • Sheep / Goats cheese (such as feta / halloumi) • Cream cheese 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Cheddar / Red Leicester • Camembert / Brie • Parmesan / Grana Padano / Pecorino / Hard cheese • Mozzarella • Jarlsberg / Emmental / Gruyere / Comte • Lacto-Free cheese • Plant-based cheese / soft cheese spread
Savoury dishes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Meals made with cow's milk (macaroni cheese / lasagne / quiche) • "Cream of" soups • Instant mash 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lactose-free meals with a portion of low-lactose cheese (such as spaghetti bolognese with parmesan or pizza with unprocessed mozzarella) • Lasagne / macaroni cheese made with the cheese sauce recipe on following page • Mashed potato with dairy-free milk
Sauces & Seasoning	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • White sauce • Yoghurt dips and sauces • Some low-calorie sweeteners 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Cheese sauce recipe on following page • Tomato sauces • Mayonnaise, ketchup, mustard, chili sauce • Most herbs and spices (check seasoning blends)
Baby Jars	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Milk based (such as porridge / rice pudding) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • With cheese (such as spaghetti bolognese) • Milk-free meals
Desserts	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Custard / rice pudding / mousse / ice cream • Milk or white chocolate 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Dark / plant-based chocolate • Cakes (such as sponge or scone) and biscuits • Plant based yoghurt / mousse / custard / ice cream

	High lactose (Do not eat)	Low lactose / Lactose-free (Can eat)
Drinks	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Milkshake Instant hot drinks (such as cappuccino, hot chocolate or malt drink) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Tea, coffee or milkshake made with Lacto-Free or plant-based milk Hot chocolate made with cocoa powder or vegan instant hot chocolate powder and low lactose milk

Recipes

Low lactose custard:

- 1 tablespoon custard powder. If unsweetened, add sugar or sweetener to taste.
- 280ml (½ pint) low lactose or plant-based milk.

Mix the custard powder, sugar and a small amount of milk in a bowl to a smooth paste. Heat the rest of the milk until nearly boiling. Add to the mix to the saucepan, stir, and bring to boil. Add 2 teaspoons of cocoa powder to make chocolate custard.

Low lactose cheese sauce:

- 25g (1oz) butter or dairy free spread
- 25g (1oz) flour (wheat or corn)
- 180 to 280ml (⅓ to ½ pint) low lactose or plant-based milk
- 25g (1oz) strong cheddar cheese

Melt the butter in saucepan. Add flour and mix to paste. Add milk a little at a time, and mix well. Bring to boil to thicken. Add cheese.

Contact details:

Nutrition and Dietetics Department: 0116 258 5400

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