

LACTOSE INTOLERANCE

Lactose intolerance occurs when our body is unable to digest lactose, a sugar found in milk and milk products in general. This must not be confused with a milk allergy.

We digest lactose with the help of an enzyme called lactase, produced in the small intestine. People with lactose intolerance produce a smaller amount of this enzyme. Unable to digest the lactose, this reaches the colon and can cause one or several of the following symptoms:

- Gas and flatulence
- Abdominal pain
- Nausea
- Diarrhoea

These symptoms appear between thirty minutes and three hours after ingesting foods containing lactose.

Some other illnesses present the same symptoms and therefore it is essential that you consult a doctor for a proper diagnosis.

The severity of the symptoms will depend on the intestine's capacity to produce lactase. Some people can consume a small amount of milk products without showing any symptoms, whilst others show symptoms after consuming the slightest amount.

Lactose intolerance may occur after a bout of gastroenteritis or after a long period of abstinence from lactose-containing foods. In such cases, we must reintroduce lactose-containing foods little by little, as follows:

- Start with the milk products that contain least lactose, such as yoghurt and mature cheeses.
- Introduce the foods together with other meals.
- Consume only a small amount of milk products each day.

There are no treatments for lactose intolerance. All you can do is avoid all foods containing lactose, such as:

- Milk of all kinds (full, semi-skimmed, skimmed, powdered, condensed and evaporated)
- Yoghurt
- Biscuits and commercial bakery products (read the labels)
- Commercial desserts (custards, creams, crème, mousse, etc.)
- Souces (read the labels or enquire about the ingredients)
- Ready-prepared foods
- Ice creams
- Cream
- Butter
- Fresh cheeses

Some people can eat yoghurt and mature cheeses without displaying symptoms: to check whether you can tolerate these, try gradually introducing them into your diet in small quantities. You can do the same with low-lactose milk and yoghurts.

Milk products are the most common sources of calcium. However, other foods contain high amounts of this mineral, such as:

- Sardines and other small fish eaten with the bones
- Broccoli
- Tofu
- Chard and spinach
- Almonds
- Vegetables, especially haricot beans

