



UNDERSTANDING LACTOSE INTOLERANCE

Overview

Lactose is the sugar in milk products. Individuals who are lactose intolerant lack the enzyme or chemical (lactase) to break down this sugar for absorption. As a result, lactose gets into the large bowel (colon) and may cause gas, bloating, diarrhea and abdominal cramping. Sometimes lactose intolerance occurs after digestive infections.

Lactose intolerance affects more than 7 million Canadians. This is likely an underestimate as many individuals do not associate their symptoms with lactose-containing foods or are asymptomatic.

How do I know if I'm lactose intolerant?

The simplest, and probably most reliable, way of diagnosing whether an individual is lactose intolerant or not is to remove all lactose products from the diet for 1 to 2 weeks and see if the symptoms resolve.

There are other tests available when the response to lactose exclusion is not clear. A blood test is readily available but probably is not needed if a trial of lactose avoidance is attempted.

How is lactose intolerance treated?

If a person is lactose intolerant, the best treatment is to avoid dairy products. Many people with lactose intolerance will be able to enjoy milk, ice cream and other dairy products if taken in small amounts or with other food. Hard cheeses and yogurt may be tolerated better than other dairy products.

There are lactase enzymes available both in the pharmacy and health food stores which help minimize the effects of lactose intolerance. The commercially-produced, lactose-reduced milks are usually quite reliable and are well tolerated, as are milk substitutes such as rice milk or soya milk.

Milk products are the primary sources of calcium and vitamin D. Anyone who avoids milk products should take calcium (1 gram) and vitamin D (400 units) supplementation assuming an otherwise normal diet. Patients with difficult or persistent problems may benefit from seeing a registered dietitian.

More information

For more information about protecting and enhancing your digestive health, please visit www.CDHF.ca

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- Please send me information about protecting and improving my digestive health.

Over 20 million Canadians suffer from digestive disorders every year. The Canadian Digestive Health Foundation believes this is unnecessary and unacceptable.

We reduce suffering and improve quality of life by empowering Canadians with trusted, up to date, science-based information about digestive health and disease.

As the Foundation of the Canadian Association of Gastroenterology, we work directly with leading physicians, scientists, and other health care professionals to help you understand and take control of your digestive health with confidence and optimism.

Through research and public education, we aim to:

 <p>REDUCE the incidence and prevalence of digestive disorders</p>	 <p>IMPROVE understanding of digestive health issues</p>
 <p>SUPPORT those suffering from digestive disorders</p>	 <p>ENHANCE quality of life for those living with digestive disorders</p>

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Canadian Digestive Health Foundation
 2525 Old Bronte Road
 Oakville, ON L6M 4J2
 Tel: 905.847.2002
 info@CDHF.ca