



Lactose is a sugar found in milk and milk products, as well as in a variety of other foods. The enzyme lactase, present in the lining of the small intestine, splits lactose into two sugars which can then be absorbed by the body and used as nourishment.

When lactase is absent or present in low levels, lactose passes through the intestine to the colon carrying extra fluid with it. In the colon, bacteria break down lactose into lactic acid and certain gases. Lactic acid acts as a laxative and can cause uncomfortable symptoms for patients like abdominal cramps, and gas or flatus.

Lactase activity is reduced in people with certain intestinal conditions such as Crohn's disease and celiac disease.

Patients taking certain medications, and alcoholic patients, may also be lactose intolerant. Finally, patients who have part of the stomach or a large portion of the small intestine surgically removed may need to reduce the amount of lactose in their diet.

Purpose:

While lactose intolerance can be quite uncomfortable, it does not damage the intestine. The purpose of this diet is to eliminate lactose, or reduce it to tolerable levels, in order to relieve symptoms like bloating, cramping, and diarrhea. Some people with lactose intolerance can consume some milk, up to ½ cup at a time and up to 2 cups daily. It is recommended to exclude all milk products from your diet until you determine what you can tolerate.

- Low-lactose diet: Generally eliminates only milk and milk products. However, some can tolerate milk and yogurt in small amounts. These patients can experiment to find a tolerable level of lactose. In some cases, people can build up their tolerance by gradually introducing foods with lactose. Lactose-reduced foods are treated with the enzyme lactase which reduced the lactose content of the food by 70 percent.
- Lactose-free diet: All lactose products must be eliminated from the diet. Food labels must be read carefully. Even foods like margarine, shortening, non-dairy creamer, and salad dressing can contain lactose.

Read food labels of processed foods, vitamins, and medications as they can contain lactose. Lactose can be hidden in foods you would not suspect, such as lunch meats.

What foods and food products ARE lactose-free?

Lactose-Free Diet:

- 100% lactose-free milk, soy milk
- All nuts and seeds
- Angel food cake
- Bacon
- Beer, wine, distilled spirits (gin, rum, etc.)
- Bisques and chowders made with water
- Bouillon, broth, meat, or vegetable stock soups
- Butter, margarine without milk derivatives (whey)
- Carbonated beverages

- Cocoa powder
- Cooked and dry cereals without added milk solids
- Eggs
- Fresh, frozen, and canned vegetables (no creamed or breaded packaged veggies)
- Fresh, frozen, canned, and dried fruits
- Fruit juices and drinks
- Fruit popsicles
- Fruit roll-ups, gum drops, jelly beans, licorice, fruit pie fillings
- Gelatin (Jell-O)
- Gravy made without milk or milk products
- Hard candy
- Herbs, spices, salt, pepper
- Honey
- Jams and jellies
- Lactose-free nutritional supplements (Ensure, Nutren)
- Maple and corn syrup
- Mayonnaise
- Molasses
- Most coffee
- Most non-dairy creamers
- Oats, barley, cornmeal, and other plain grains
- Olives
- Pasta
- Peanut butter
- Peas, beans, or lentils (dried, canned or frozen)
- Plain beef, lamb, veal, pork, wild game, poultry, fish, shellfish, kosher prepared meat products

- Plain potato and corn tortilla chips
- Plain pretzels
- Popcorn
- Rice
- Rice and popcorn cakes, graham crackers, Pareve-Jewish bakery products
- Salad dressing without cheese or milk
- Salsa, mustard, ketchup, pickles, uncreamed horseradish, relish
- Sauces made without milk or milk products
- Sugar
- Tea
- Tofu
- Tomato and spaghetti sauces without cheese
- Tomato paste and purée
- Vegetable juice
- Vegetable oils
- Water-based breads (Italian, French, Jewish rye)

What foods and food products ARE NOT lactose-free?

While a lactose-free diet can improve your health, dairy products are important sources of calcium, riboflavin, and vitamin D intake through other sources like non-dairy calcium-rich foods, fortified foods, or supplements.