

Patient Information

Information on lactose intolerance

What is lactose intolerance?

Lactose intolerance is when a baby or small child is unable to tolerate lactose, a sugar found in cow's milk. The following are some characteristics of lactose intolerance:

- This is a reaction to cow's milk that babies or small children can develop after suffering from gastroenteritis (sickness and diarrhoea). They may have tolerated cow's milk or ordinary baby formula before the gastroenteritis but now they will probably have watery diarrhoea, wind and be unsettled.
- Lactose intolerance is almost always temporary, and will go away after your baby has fully recovered and regained any lost weight. This may take a couple of weeks or could last for up to a couple of months.
- To help stop the symptoms of lactose intolerance, your baby should stop feeding on cow's milk and ordinary baby formulas based on cow's milk and use a lactose free baby formula. These are widely available in supermarkets and pharmacists. Older children can use "lacto free" milks which are also widely available. **We would not usually recommend soya milks for children under one year.**

Avoiding milk in food

The following information will help you to ensure that your baby or child avoids lactose in their diet.

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You will need to avoid all cow's milk, and foods which are made from cow's milk, such as:

- Butter
- Cheese
- Cream
- Chocolate
- Cream fraiche
- Custard
- Fromage frais
- Ice cream
- Margarine
- Milk powder
- Rice pudding
- Yoghurt

You will also need to check the ingredients of all the foods you buy. EU food regulations require that all foods that contain cow's milk must have this *clearly emphasised* on their labelled ingredients list but manufacturers may choose how they do this.

Calcium is vital for the normal growth and strengthening of bones but since our bodies cannot make it, we need to get it from the foods that we eat and drink. If you are following a cow's milk or lactose-free diet it is important to look for foods that are **fortified with calcium** since milk and dairy products are major sources.

It is now easier to avoid cow's milk in cooking and preparing foods thanks to the large number of 'Free from dairy' and lactose-free versions of common place foods and ingredients available. You may also find it helpful to adjust your own recipes by using lactose-free substitutes such as:

- lactose-free and dairy-free margarines
- calcium fortified lactose-free milk and 'milk' substitutes such as oat, almond, hazelnut, coconut, soya and hemp
- lactose-free cream, yoghurt, custard and ice cream
- lactose-free cheese and cheese spreads

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When should I retry lactose?

- Once your child seems to have recovered from their illness and is completely better you can try some of their usual milk to see what happens. If their symptoms of diarrhoea come back then wait a few weeks and try again.

Remember

- Unless you know a food is lactose-free, leave it out.
- Ingredients of products change from time to time, so you should check the ingredients label on all the foods you purchase **every time**.
- Some of the dairy-free 'milks' and products are great sources of calcium but they may also contain high amounts of sugar. Always look after your child's teeth by brushing them at least twice a day and be mindful of the different foods and drinks they eat containing sugar. Keep sugary foods and drinks to mealtimes to keep their teeth and gums healthy.
- Some of the organic milk-free foods available are not fortified with extra calcium. Read the label to ensure that you are choosing the version of foods and drinks that are fortified with calcium where possible.