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Defining Lactose Intolerance

Up to 15% of Britons are estimated to be lactose intolerant. Despite an increased awareness of food allergies and intolerances, there is still much work to be done to help those living with the condition have the best possible quality of life.

Lactose intolerance is a condition where there is an inability to fully digest lactose, the sugar found in milk and milk products, resulting in a variety of intestinal problems. This is caused by insufficient lactase production in the gut. Lactase is the enzyme that breaks down the disaccharide lactose to its monosaccharide counterparts.

Symptoms

The symptoms and severity of LI can vary between individuals; in some rare genetic cases there is a complete absence of lactase from birth. More commonly individuals have a genetic tendency (called Primary lactase deficiency) which causes a gradual reduction in lactase activity leading to lactose intolerance in older children and adults. There is also Secondary lactase deficiency; a common but usually temporary consequence of a damage to the intestinal wall.

Symptoms tend to start between thirty minutes to two hours after eating lactose and include abdominal distension, stomach cramps, nausea, flatulence and diarrhoea. Symptoms are caused by undigested lactose reaching the large bowel, where it is fermented by colonic bacteria. Because the symptoms can appear similar to IBS or actual milk allergy, it can be hard to diagnose LI.

Incidence

In the UK the incidence of LI is around 15% of the population, but many sufferers may be undiagnosed. The incidence is around 95% for Asians 75% for Afro-Caribbeans and 50% for Mediterraneans.

It is believed that the gene for producing lactase only recently evolved in man's history. However it only evolved in certain populations where milk started to form part of the diet and not in others where milk did not feature in the diet. Today, the genetic make up of many individuals retains the inability to fully digest lactose.

Testing for lactose intolerance

A reliable test for diagnosing LI is the Elimination Challenge Diet (ECD) which was developed by registered Dietitians and recently reviewed by the BDA. It involves eliminating all lactose containing foods from the diet for two weeks to see if symptoms disappear. If symptoms do not disappear, then they are unlikely to have lactose intolerance. If symptoms do substantially reduce then lactose can be slowly re-introduced into the diet see how much can be tolerated.

Most people can successfully try the ECD without the



help of a healthcare professional providing there has not been significant weight loss and the diet remains balanced.

Managing lactose intolerance

The challenge for individuals with lactose intolerance is not to miss out on nutrients such as calcium and vitamins A and B, which are found in milk and milk products. It is also important that they still have a varied, balanced and enjoyable diet.

Most dairy foods contain some lactose. However, even people with severe lactose intolerance can usually eat some yoghurt; hard cheeses and lactose-reduced milk.

Arla's Lactofree, a lactose free dairy drink* made from semi-skimmed cows milk allows lactose intolerant individuals to enjoy the full taste and nutritional benefits of cows' milk without the side effects from the lactose. Lactofree Whole and Lactofree Yogurt is also now available.

Lactose, or milk derivatives containing lactose, can be present in other foods such as bread, cereals, tinned soups, ready meals, crisps and tablet coatings. It is always worth encouraging patients to read the label and look for lactose, particularly noting that ingredients are listed with the highest level ingredients first.

Visit www.lactofree.co.uk for further information and details on the ECD and a suitable diet for lactose intolerance.



*We make every effort possible to ensure that Lactofree products contain no lactose. We carry out rigorous scientific testing using the most accurate UKAS accredited tests available which enable us to detect lactose at the trace level of 0.03%. At this detection level our tests show that there is no lactose present in Lactofree. Please refer to www.lactofree.co.uk for more information.



BAKED RICE PUDDING WITH BROWN SUGARED PLUMS

Serves 4

- 1 teaspoon sunflower oil
- 85g pudding, rice washed
- 40g caster sugar
- 750mls Lactofree milk
- 1 vanilla pod split (optional)

For the topping

- 450g plums washed halved and stoned
- 30g demerera sugar

- Pre heat oven to 160/c Gas 3. Use the oil to grease a shallow oven proof dish. Place the rice, sugar milk and vanilla pod and stir to combine.
- Place in the oven until the rice pudding is golden onto, creamy and cooked (approx 2 / 2 1/2 hours).
- Remove from the oven and increase the oven temp to 200c/ Gas mark 6. Lay the halved plums over the surface of the rice pudding (cut side up) and scatter over the demerera sugar. Return to the oven for a further 10/15 minutes or until the plums are tender and bubbling hot.



TUTTI FRUTTI SMOOTHIE

Serves 2

- 1 large, ripe banana, peeled, chopped
- 115g/4oz raspberries
- 115g/4oz strawberries, hulled
- 200ml/7 fl oz cold Lactofree
- 60ml/4tbsp Lactofree strawberry or raspberry yogurt
- 4 large ice cubes

- Place 2 large glasses in the freezer to chill.
- Place all the ingredients into a liquidizer (reserve a few raspberries for decoration). Blend well until smooth.
- Pour into glasses and top with a few fresh raspberries. Serve straight away.

Serve in traditional ice cream sundae/tall shaped glasses.