



Lactose Intolerance: The Facts

Up to 15 per cent of Britons are estimated to be lactose intolerant, but lack of knowledge means the number could be much higher.

Lactose intolerance is caused by a deficiency of lactase, an enzyme present in the lining of the small intestine needed to digest lactose, a disaccharide present in milk and other dairy products. Undigested lactose moves through to the large intestine, where it is fermented by bacteria to cause abdominal symptoms, including:

- flatulence
- stomach cramps
- nausea
- bloating
- diarrhoea.

Symptoms usually begin 30 minutes to two hours after eating and are often mistaken for irritable bowel syndrome. The condition can have a significant impact on an individual's quality of life, but many people remain undiagnosed and awareness is low. Only 4 per cent of those questioned for a national YouGov survey understood the meaning of lactose intolerance.

Some people are born with lactose intolerance, while others develop the condition. Only around a third of adults retain the ability to digest lactose into adulthood. The prevalence of lactose intolerance varies between ethnic groups, as does the age of onset. In people of black and Asian origin, hypolactasia usually manifests itself in early childhood, whereas in the white population it seems to occur later in childhood or in adolescence.

Diagnosis

There are no definitive criteria for diagnosis and these symptoms are not limited to lactose intolerance, meaning the condition can often be misdiagnosed as a dairy allergy or irritable bowel syndrome. Lactofree has developed an elimination diet you can recommend to adult patients you suspect may be lactose intolerant.

The diet is a simple approximation of lactose intolerance whereby suspect foods are removed from the diet for a period of two weeks. If symptoms disappear with a lactose-free diet and appear again after re-introduction of lactose, then lactose intolerance is likely. It is important to make patients aware that they should not permanently remove foods from their diet without guidance from a Registered Dietitian. The elimination diet sheet is available for download at www.lactofree.co.uk

Management

There is no cure for lactose intolerance but it can be managed by avoiding lactose in the diet, taking lactase supplements, and using milk alternatives. Many sufferers avoid alternatives because of the taste, but one is now available that tastes just like cows' milk.

Lactofree is semi-skimmed cows' milk with the lactose removed and is the only lactose-free dairy drink on the market. A filtration process and the addition of the lactase enzyme ensures more than 99.95 per cent of the lactose is removed but the taste and nutritional content remain. Lactofree can be used in cooking and given to children in the same way as cows' milk, allowing people living with lactose intolerance to enjoy the taste of real dairy again.

Tips for coping with lactose intolerance

- Check all food labels - lactose is hidden in food such as chocolate biscuits, cake mix, pizza bases and even crisps
- Drink milk and eat dairy food with meals and snacks
- Try Lactofree on it's own or in cooking

Lactofree comes in two varieties:

- Lactofree Fresh - £1.35/litre
- Lactofree Longlife - £1.28/litre.

Sources of further information

- www.lactofree.co.uk
- Arla helpline: 0845 600 6688

