

## Information for Milk and Dairy

Milk and dairy products such as cheese, yoghurt and fromage frais are great sources of protein and vitamins A and B12. They're also an important source of calcium, which helps to keep our bones strong. The calcium in dairy foods is easy for the body to absorb.

### **Milk allergy/milk intolerance or lactose intolerance**

([www.eatwell.gov.uk](http://www.eatwell.gov.uk) accessed July 2010)

Lactose is a sugar found naturally in milk. It is important to distinguish between **lactose intolerance** and milk allergy, because milk allergy can cause severe reactions.

**Lactose intolerance** is caused by a shortage of the enzyme lactase, which is needed to break down lactose so it can be absorbed into the bloodstream. When someone doesn't have enough of this enzyme, lactose isn't absorbed properly from the gut, which can cause symptoms such as bloating and diarrhoea. This condition normally appears in adults because people's levels of lactase begin to decrease after childhood. Some children are born with lactose intolerance, but this is rare. People with lactose intolerance often find that they can eat cheese and yoghurt without any problems. Cheese contains much less lactose than milk. Yoghurt contains a similar amount of lactose to milk, but it still seems to be easier to digest for people with lactose intolerance. This might be something to do with the bacteria used to make it.

**Milk allergy**, unlike lactose intolerance, can cause severe reactions. But often the symptoms are mild. They can affect any part of the body and can include rashes, diarrhoea, vomiting, stomach cramps and difficulty breathing.

Babies and young children can experience two types of reaction to milk: an allergy or an intolerance.

Allergy to cows' milk is the most common food allergy in childhood and affects 2% to 7% of babies under one year old. It's more common in babies with atopic dermatitis (a skin rash caused by an allergic reaction). Children usually grow out of milk allergy by the time they are three, but about a fifth are still allergic to milk when they are adults. The symptoms of milk allergy are often mild and can affect any part of the body. They can include rashes, diarrhoea, vomiting, stomach cramps and difficulty in breathing. In a very few cases, milk allergy can cause anaphylaxis.

Cows' milk allergy is caused by a reaction to a number of proteins in cows' milk and people can react to whole milk, or to casein or whey. Casein is the curd that forms when milk sours, and whey is the watery part that is left when the curd is removed.

Infant formula and follow-on formula based on goats' milk protein are not suitable alternatives for babies who are intolerant or allergic to cows' milk formulas.

**Milk intolerance**, also known as cows' milk protein intolerance, is common in babies and children. It is different to milk allergy and lactose intolerance. Children who have milk intolerance can have symptoms from the first time they have cows' milk. Symptoms of milk intolerance can include eczema, vomiting, diarrhoea, and stomach cramps, but not hives or breathing problems (symptoms of milk allergy). Children who have milk intolerance often grow out of it by the time they go to school.

*Don't cut milk and dairy products out of your diet, or your child's diet, without talking to your GP or a dietician. Otherwise you or your child might not get enough of important nutrients such as calcium.*