

The Dairy Dilemma

Q. I suspect that I have lactose intolerance. How can I know for sure? Are there any nutritional supplements that can prevent this? I love ice cream and milk and don't want to give them up!

—P.B., Glendale, California

A. If you love ice cream, you're not alone. The dozens of selections available on supermarket dairy aisles or in ice cream parlors suggest that you have plenty of company.

And if your stomach isn't happy about your love of ice cream, you aren't alone, either. "Lactose intolerance"—a source of physical discomfort for many a dairy-food lover—affects a noteworthy segment of the U.S. population. It occurs in approximately 80 percent of Asian and Native Americans, 75 percent of African Americans, 50 percent of Hispanic Americans and 20 percent of Caucasian Americans.

People who are lactose intolerant lack the enzyme "lactase," which breaks down milk sugar into glucose and galactose—which are simple sugars called monosaccharides. The absence of lactase in the body allows lactose to remain in the small intestine, causing abdominal bloating or swelling, cramps or diarrhea, and general abdominal discomfort. Usually these symptoms occur 30 minutes to two hours after dairy products have been ingested.

Foods especially high in lactose are cow's milk—which includes skim milk—ice cream, soft cheeses such as cottage cheese and cream cheese, and frozen yogurt.

Other dairy products with lower levels of lactose include butter, most other cheeses, and regular yogurt. The majority of people who have lactose intolerance can tolerate small amounts of foods from this second group.

If you want to continue drinking milk, then I suggest you use Lactaid drops, which contain the lactase enzyme, and can simply be added to a glass of milk. These drops will eliminate most of the lactose.

Lactaid caplets, taken orally, also will help, or you may want to switch to the Lactaid brand of milk.

If you are not sure whether or not you truly are lactose intolerant, then I suggest that you stop eating or drinking all dairy products for a week—and then drink a glass of milk. If the common symptoms of bloating and abdominal pains occur, then it is very likely you have lactose intolerance.

If so, then the next time you drop by your favorite ice cream shop, you'll have a better idea of whether to order one scoop ... or two.

Q. My 6-year-old son has autism and rarely speaks. I have taken him to numerous specialists, and he has been on many different medications, but nothing has helped. Can you recommend nutritional aids?

—A.R., Minneapolis, Minnesota

A.Autism is a developmental disability marked by a disorder of language, a failure to develop social relationships or a difficulty in making friends, a significant delay in intellectual development, and ritualistic or compulsive behavior. It affects more than 400,000 people in the United States, and indications are that the number is increasing.

Perhaps most important is that your child should be tested for the presence of “heavy metals” in his body. Many patients with autism have elevated amounts of these toxic metals, such as mercury, lead, cadmium, arsenic and antimony. A stool test can determine this. If you cannot find a doctor in your area who performs a test for this, call Doctor's Data in Chicago at (800) 323-2784 for more information.

It is important to have your son tested for food allergies. Then avoid all foods that your child is allergic to.

Put him on a high-fiber diet according to his blood type, with plenty of fruits, vegetables and brown rice. Eliminate soft drinks, chocolate, fast or processed foods, and all wheat and dairy products.

Also give him a multivitamin-mineral that contains at least 100 mg (milligrams) of magnesium, 50 mg of B6, 500 mg of vitamin C, and at least 500 mcg (micrograms) of folic acid and B12.