

Dairy-Free Diet

Most people who follow a dairy-free diet are allergic to dairy products. However, a few people who are sensitive to lactose (milk sugar) also need to avoid *all* dairy products. Those who have reactions to lactose are called “lactose-intolerant.” They lack adequate amounts of the enzyme lactase needed to digest milk sugar. Unlike people who are allergic to dairy products, most lactose-intolerant people may be able to consume dairy products that naturally contain only traces of lactose (such as hard cheese, butter, or cream) or those products that contain enzymes to help break down lactose. Many lactose-intolerant people can also eat yogurt without side effects, despite its high lactose content. This is due to the bacteria in most yogurts (except frozen yogurt), which often break down the lactose before the lactose-intolerant person has a chance to react to it.¹

A milk allergy is an immune system response to the presence of milk protein (casein) in the body. The body perceives the protein as “foreign” and proceeds to mount an attack against it, which results in the symptoms of an allergic reaction. The most common food allergy in infants and young children is to cow’s milk. Many children will outgrow milk allergy.

What are the symptoms?

The symptoms of lactose intolerance occur within a few hours of ingestion of milk or milk products and can include bloating, abdominal pain, gas, and diarrhea. The severity of lactose intolerance varies among individuals. Milk *allergy* symptoms may include any of the common symptoms of food allergies, including skin rashes or hives, gastrointestinal distress, asthma, recurrent ear infections, runny or stuffy nose, breathing problems, or many other possible symptoms.²

What do I need to avoid?

To avoid milk and milk products ask about ingredients at restaurants and others’ homes, read food labels, and become familiar with the technical or scientific terms for milk. Following is a partial list of ingredients to avoid. Many Americans receive the majority of their calcium intake from dairy products. It is important to be sure to eat other calcium-rich foods (leafy green vegetables, almonds, sardines, etc) or take supplements.

- Baked goods such as bread, pancakes, biscuits, muffins, cakes, crackers, baking mixes (read labels for dairy product ingredients)
- Au gratin foods
- Butter (contains little lactose)
- Buttermilk
- Candy (especially creams and chocolate)
- Casein (different names caseinate, calcium caseinate, ammonia caseinate, magnesium caseinate, potassium caseinate, and sodium caseinate. Casein can be used in food processing as an extender, tenderizer, and protein fortifier, and can be found in unexpected places, including chewing gum and imitation sausage)
- Cheeses
- Cheese sauces
- Chocolate milk and drinks
- Coffeemate
- Cold cuts (such as bologna)
- Cottage cheese
- Cream (contains little lactose)
- Cream soups
- Creamed or scalloped foods
- Curds
- Dry cereals containing milk powder, such as some granolas
- Dry milk powder

- Dry milk solids
- Evaporated milk
- Fondues
- Grated cheese
- Gravies (some)
- Ice cream
- Malted milk
- Margarine (most)
- Meat loaf and patties (some)
- Milk: whole, skim, 1%, and 2%
- Milk chocolate
- Nondairy creamers (most)
- Non-kosher luncheon meats (some)
- Puddings (most)
- Sausage (some)
- Sherbet
- Wieners (some)
- Whey
- White sauces
- Yogurt

Note: The words "non-dairy" do not necessarily mean that a product does not contain casein, and many non-dairy products on the market, including soy cheeses, almond cheeses, and rice cheeses use casein as a primary protein-boosting ingredient.³ Look for “milk-free” rather than “non-dairy.”

What to Eat Instead of Cow’s Milk Products

Milk substitutes: Oat, almond, rice, other grain or nut beverages, coconut milk, soy (Be aware that soy milk is hard to digest, is a frequent allergen, and is suspected of causing health problems.)

Ghee (those with extreme intolerance to casein can often take butter in the form of ghee or clarified butter, from which the milk solids have been removed)

Goat’s milk and sheep’s milk are more easily digested than cow’s milk and may be tolerated by people with allergy to cow’s milk. Try goat’s milk or sheep’s milk feta cheese.

Non-dairy products (always read the label):

- Non-dairy ice cream (e.g. Rice Dream)
- Non-dairy chocolate
- Non-dairy cheeses
- Non-dairy yogurt
- Other milk-free or non-dairy products

Resources

Allergy Relieve and Prevention by Jacqueline Krohn, MD

The No Milk Page: <http://www.NoMilk.com>

Food Allergy Network: <http://www.foodallergy.org>

References available upon request.