



**BC Cancer Agency**

CARE & RESEARCH

An agency of the Provincial Health Services Authority

## ONCOLOGY NUTRITION

### Low Lactose Guidelines

Lactose is a natural sugar found in dairy products. Some individuals who have diarrhea may be temporarily unable to digest lactose. Following these guidelines may help alleviate your symptoms.

1. Follow these guidelines for one week. If your symptoms do not improve then discontinue this diet. If your symptoms do improve, follow these guidelines until your symptoms are gone.
2. Eat small frequent meals.
3. Have at least 1.5 – 2 liters (6 – 8 cups) of fluid per day.
4. Avoid any food that makes your symptoms worse.
5. Try small amounts of milk products spread through the day with other foods. Large servings on their own may lead to discomfort.
6. Try Lactaid<sup>®</sup> treated foods. There are three ways to obtain these in your diet.
  - a. Lactaid<sup>®</sup>- treated milk  
This milk has most of the lactose already broken down. It is available in one litre containers in grocery stores and can be used just like regular milk. Some people find that lactaid treated milk tastes sweeter than regular milk. You should not notice any other taste difference.
  - b. Lactaid<sup>®</sup>- drops  
These are drops that will make the lactose in regular milk easier to absorb. The drops should be added 24 hours before you drink the milk. After 24 hours, most of the lactose is broken down. You can use this milk in cooking as well. The drops are available at pharmacies or health food stores.
  - c. Lactaid<sup>®</sup> tablets  
These are chewable tablets that you can take just before a meal or snack containing milk or milk products. You can purchase these at pharmacies or health food stores.
7. Try milk substitutes
  - a. Soy milk  
Soy milk is available in many different flavors and can also be substituted in most recipes. It can be purchased at most grocery stores and health food stores.

- b. Rich's Coffee Rich  
Diluted half and half with water can be used in most recipes. It can be purchased at most grocery stores.
- c. Powdered coffee whiteners  
Can be purchased at most grocery stores.
- d. Rice milk (Rice Dream)  
Rice milk can be purchased at most health food stores and may be available at some grocery stores.

Note: The nutrient content of these milk substitutes are not equal to regular milk (i.e. they are lower in protein and calcium).

- 8. You may need a vitamin/mineral supplement, depending on your tolerance of lactose foods and the type of milk substitute you use. Check with your dietitian/nutritionist.
- 9. Follow these guidelines when re-introducing milk products into your diet.
  - a. Add small amounts of low lactose foods first (hard cheese).
  - b. Next add fermented dairy products (yogurt, buttermilk).
  - c. Gradually add small amounts of regular dairy products (ice-cream, cream soup, milk).

Monitor your symptoms. If you experience gas, bloating or diarrhea when reintroducing a particular food then avoid it and reintroduce it later.

## **LACTOSE CONTENT OF FOODS**

### **Low Lactose**

sherbet  
swiss cheese  
blue cheese  
cheddar cheese  
mozzarella cheese  
brick cheese  
parmesan cheese  
cream cheese cottage cheese  
whipping cream  
butter  
lactaid-treated milk

### **Medium Lactose**

buttermilk  
sour cream  
light cream  
low fat yogurt  
half-and-half  
ice cream  
ice-milk  
feta cheese

### **High Lactose**

condensed milk  
evaporated milk  
whole milk  
2% milk  
skim milk  
skim milk powder  
processed cheese products

## **Common Questions**

### **What is Lactose?**

Lactose is a natural sugar that is found mostly in milk and milk products. It needs to be broken down by an enzyme called lactase in your intestine in order for it to be absorbed and used for energy. Individuals who do not have an adequate amount of lactase enzyme are lactose intolerant.

### **How do I know if I am lactose intolerant?**

If you have any of the following symptoms soon after having milk or milk products you may be lactose intolerant:

- Excess gas and/or bloating
- Abdominal cramps
- Diarrhea

### **Do I have to avoid all dairy products?**

No. Most individuals who are lactose intolerant can tolerate small amounts of lactose.

June 1998

This information is not meant to replace the medical counsel of your doctor or individual consultation with a registered dietitian. This information may only be used in its entirety.