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# Lactose Intolerance

Lactose intolerance is a condition in which a person is unable to digest a lot of lactose due to a lack of the enzyme lactase. Lactose intolerance symptoms can be cramps, bloating and diarrhea.

## Overview

- Lactose intolerance is when you are **not able to digest a lot of lactose**, which is **the main sugar in milk**.
- Lactose intolerance results from a **shortage of the enzyme lactase**, which is normally made by the cells that line the small gut. Lactase breaks down the sugar in milk into simpler forms so it can then be pulled into the blood stream.
- Symptoms start about **30 minutes to two hours after eating or drinking foods that have lactose** (mainly milk products). The harshness of symptoms varies based on the amount of lactose you are able to handle.
- For most people, lactose intolerance **develops over time**.
- Symptoms may start years after childhood.
- Close to 50 million adults in the U.S. are lactose intolerant.
- Lactose intolerance is usually caused by genes, meaning you are born with it, and it doesn't go away.
- Sometimes lactose intolerance is brought on by something else, such as a virus or infection that causes temporary damage to the small intestine. Once your gut is healed from these other causes, you are often able to consume lactose again.



## Common Symptoms

Symptoms of lactose intolerance are not the same for each person.

Some common symptoms are:

- Upset belly.
- Cramps.
- Bloating.
- Gas.
- Diarrhea (loose stool).