

Dairy Intolerance

Dairy intolerance is frequently self-diagnosed and may contribute to numerous digestive symptoms such as bloating; flatulence; diarrhoea; constipation and general stomach aches. Most people believe that they are lactose intolerant without proper diagnosis. If you are reading this and thinking that you have a problem digesting dairy products, it is best to undertake appropriate testing with your naturopath/health professional to ensure that a correct diagnosis is achieved. Intolerance may constitute a problem with casein (protein component of dairy), lactose (sugar component of dairy), lipid (fat component) or an actual dairy allergy. The intolerance or allergy may be against cow's milk products or those made from sheep's, goat's or all animal milks. Correct diagnosis can ensure that your diet is nutritional sound and is not depleted or deficient in essential nutrients.

Avoiding products from cow's milk is easier than in the past. Milk and milk products from sheep & goat have become more accessible. Additionally, milk and milk products can be made from soy, oat, almond and rice.

Other symptoms

Dairy consumption is also strongly linked to numerous health complaints including:

- Infertility (both male and female)
- Lowered immunity
- Sinusitis and nasal catarrh
- Excessive mucous production – nasal, ear wax, chest phlegm
- Digestive discomfort – Irritable bowel syndrome, diarrhoea, constipation, digestive discomfort, others

Foods to avoid

Foods that should be avoided will be dependant on what part of the dairy milk you are intolerant. For example if you have symptoms from the lipid component, you will digest yoghurt most easily. If you have symptoms from lactose, you will find it easier to digest hard yellow cheese and butter.

General dairy intolerance will be best managed by avoiding the following foods. Note that the list of foods is listed from worst to best sources – i.e. sources most likely to cause discomfort to those that are less likely to cause aggravation.

- Ice-cream
- Milk
- Hard yellow cheese
- Soft cheese
- Cream/sour cream
- Butter
- Yoghurt

Important points

- Do not expect restaurants to be accurate, anticipate this when ordering.
- Remember to look for hidden dairy and read the ingredients carefully in items such as:
 - Cooked or prepared foods
 - Breads
 - Cakes, biscuits etc
 - Pasta sauces (especially cream based or cheese based)
 - Energy bars, fruit bars, roll ups

The soy debate

Most people will easily replace dairy products with soy products. It is important to remember that not all soy products are created equal. Ensure that you purchase products that are free from genetic modification, use whole soybeans and are free from added sugar, malt and other nasties. Furthermore, remember do not over-consume soy products as it is likely that you may develop problems from this food group as well. The trick to healthy eating is that it is all about variety and ensuring that you rotate your foods where possible.

Dairy alternatives

My general recommendation to all patients is to encourage variety with their dairy and dairy-alternative products. A few examples are listed below that highlights how one can utilise all milk options to rotate their foods sufficiently. Remember that all recommendations are individual and you will need to consider your own level of dairy intolerance.

- Butter – nut butter, dips (humous, tahina, babaganoush), tahini, avocado
- Liquid milk – Almond, soy, oat or rice milks
 - It is important to change milk sources every week or when the bottle has been finished.
- White cheese – goat or sheep derived
- Yoghurt – sheep, goat or cow derived
- Cheese spreads – alternatives such as dips (humous, tahina, babaganoush) or tahini
- Yellow cheese – cow or sheep derived (if tolerable)

Calcium

By reducing dairy products from one's diet, the main nutritional concern is the loss of a useful source of dietary calcium. Calcium is the most common mineral in the body. Most of it is found stored in bones and teeth (about 99%) with the rest found mainly in serum (blood) and interstitial fluid. Deficiency of this mineral results in loss of calcium from bones and causes the diseases rickets and osteomalacia.

Calcium is essential for the correct function of every single cell in the body and has many functions:

- Structure of bones and teeth.
- Necessary for muscle contraction and normal muscle function.
- Necessary for normal nerve function and impulse conduction.
- Necessary for blood clotting.

Food sources of calcium

The best food source of calcium is actually Kelp (a seaweed). It contains 1093mg of calcium per 100g! Below are some of the main sources of calcium. Please note the comparison between cow's milk (listed first) and other calcium-rich alternatives.

- Cow's milk 291mg/cup
- Almonds 332mg/cup
- Hazelnuts 282mg/cup
- Black strap molasses 137mg/cup
- Chick peas 150mg/cup
- Tofu 100mg/3.5oz
- Kombu 80mg/10g (1 stick)
- Tahini 64mg/teaspoon
- Sardines 380mg/100g
- Salmon (with bones) 335mg/100g
- Goat's milk 326mg/cup
- Dried figs 269mg/10 figs
- Rhubarb 105mg/cup
- Perch 91mg/84g
- Chinese cabbage 74mg/cup
- Soy milk 74.5mg/cup
- Green leafy vegetables also contain high amounts of calcium and other great nutrients

Conclusion

In summary it, is it essential that you obtain an accurate diagnosis of dairy intolerance or allergy. Dairy products are a highly nutritious food source and should not be avoided unless indicated. Please make sure that you seek appropriate advice from a naturopath/nutritionist to ensure that you eat a balanced diet and obtain optimal nutrition.

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