What It Is
Lactose intolerance means you have trouble digesting milk and milk products. Lactose is the natural sugar found in milk and other dairy products. When you have lactose intolerance, your body doesn’t have enough of an enzyme called lactase. The enzyme lactase is formed in the small intestine and breaks down lactose into two simple sugars that are absorbed into the bloodstream.

What It Is Not
Lactose intolerance is not the same as a milk allergy. People who have milk allergies have a reaction to the protein in milk. This is triggered by their immune system and may be life-threatening.

People with milk allergies often need to totally avoid milk and milk products. With lactose intolerance, you will likely not need to do this.

Symptoms
Without enough lactase, you may feel ill when drinking or eating milk products. You may have:

- Nausea
- Diarrhea
- Gas
- Bloating or swelling of your stomach
- Cramps or pain in your lower belly (abdomen)

Foods that Contain Lactose
Lactose is found in milk and all foods that are made with milk such as:

- Ice cream
- Cream
- Sour cream
- Butter
- Cheese
- Cottage cheese
- Yogurt

Foods that often contain small amounts of lactose include:

- Bread and other baked goods
- Waffles, pancakes, biscuits, cakes, cookies, and mixes to make them
- Soups, breakfast drinks, and instant mashed potatoes
- Lunch meats (non-kosher)

When buying boxed, canned, frozen, or packaged foods, you can look for the following words on the label. Label ingredients are listed in descending order so if the lactose item is at the end of the list, the amount will be very small.

- Milk
- Lactose
- Milk by-products
- Dry milk solids
- Nonfat dry milk
- Whey
- Curds
Your Diet
Milk and milk products are an excellent source of calcium, which is important for healthy bones.

To continue to have these benefits in your diet, you can use:
- Lactose-free and lactose-reduced milk and milk products – there is little or no taste difference
- Lactase enzyme tablets that you take when having foods that contain lactose
- Liquid lactase drops that you add to milk and other liquids with lactose

Some people find they can eat cheese and yogurt, which have less lactose than milk.

Having milk or a milk product with other food at a meal can reduce symptoms. This helps slow down digestion, making it easier to absorb lactose.

You may want to start by avoiding all milk and dairy products and then slowly adding small amounts of these foods back in.

If you are not eating dairy products or having very small amounts, you may need to take a calcium supplement to keep your bones healthy. The amount of calcium your body needs depends upon what stage of life you are in. Talk with your dietitian or doctor about this and other questions or concerns about your diet.

Other Good Sources of Calcium
Almonds, Brazil nuts, sunflower seeds, Blackstrap molasses
Broccoli
Calcium fortified orange juice
Calcium fortified tofu
Calcium fortified bread
Calcium fortified cereal
Calcium fortified soy, rice, almond, coconut milks**
Canned White Beans
Cooked Greens – kale, collards, turnip
Salmon and sardines canned with their soft bones

** Be sure to check the label on these milks to ensure that are fortified.

For more information:
- Choosemyplate.gov
- Eatright.org