



Children's Medical Group of Saginaw Bay, PLLC

Cow's Milk Intolerance vs Lactose Intolerance

This information is intended for children over a year of age. If you have concerns about lactose or cow's milk intolerance in your infant under 1 year, **we will use changes to formula to manage.**

Breast milk, cow's milk and infant formula (cow's milk based) have lactose as their sugar. Lactose is a sugar that requires digestion to separate it into glucose and galactose. The enzyme to digest the lactose is called lactase and it exists on the surface of the intestine. Most babies can easily digest lactose. Some children as they get older lose the lactase enzyme which causes lactose intolerance. Lactose intolerance causes the healthy bacteria to break down the lactose causing abdominal cramps and diarrhea. The symptoms can be based on the amount of lactose eaten (milk, dairy products, additional ingredient in some foods). Some children will also

temporarily lose the ability to digest lactose after a bad stomach bug- after a few weeks the enzyme will be repaired on the intestinal surface as the intestine heals from the infection. If your child has symptoms suggesting lactose intolerance, try milk products that are lactose free (brand name of Lact-Aid and others). These foods have



had the lactose broken down into glucose and galactose in advance so the sugar content is the same but there is no lactose that requires digestion. You can also buy lactase powder and capsules- this contains the lactase enzyme to break down the lactose during digestion. If switching to lactose free products or using lactase prevents the cramping and diarrhea associated with taking lactose, you have confirmed that your child is lactose intolerant. Unless they are just getting over a stomach bug (in which case you could re-try lactose in 2-4 weeks) they will probably never tolerate lactose however the amount they can tolerate may change over time (usually they will be able to tolerate less as they get older).

There are two main proteins in cow's milk and other dairy products. They are casein and whey. Although these proteins are also in human milk the protein is not the same in human's vs other animals or plants (human, cow, goat, soy, almond, cashew). Proteins can be recognized by our immune system as foreign and can trigger an allergy to the protein (pet, pollens, ragweed, trees, molds, foods). Typical symptoms of food allergies are stomach discomfort, vomiting and diarrhea. Rarely food allergies can be severe associated with hives and difficulty breathing (shellfish, nuts). Localized rashes around the mouth in infants and toddlers after eating is usually not allergic and will disappear by a few years of age. If your child develops symptoms after eating dairy products, try stopping all dairy products for two weeks. Make sure you check labels of processed foods- casein and whey is frequently used as an ingredient. If your child has no



symptoms during these two weeks, start giving your child dairy products again for 1-2 weeks to see if the symptoms return. If symptoms did not go away when you stopped dairy products or the symptoms did not come back when you restarted dairy products, your child does NOT have a cow's milk protein allergy. If the symptoms return after restarting dairy products, stop them. If the symptoms go away again, your child DOES have a cow's milk protein intolerance. If your child is

under 3 years old, you could re-try dairy products every 3-6 months until age 3. If your child has not outgrown their milk intolerance by 3 years of age they probably won't. Although your child may tolerate small amounts of milk protein, it is probably better to avoid food that contains cow's milk protein (casein and whey from cow). Children who can't tolerate cow's milk should tolerate protein from other sources (goat, soy, almond, cashew) however they are at increased risk of developing allergies to other foods.