



Cows' milk allergy - affects around 3-6% of infants and young children who usually start to have symptoms in their first few months. This causes many health problems and is frequently not diagnosed, or takes many months to be diagnosed.

Most children outgrow milk allergy by five years of age so true milk allergy in older children and adults is extremely uncommon.

Milk and dairy foods are an important part of our diet, providing many nutrients including proteins, minerals and vitamins essential for growth, bone and dental health. It is therefore important that if you think that you or your baby may be allergic to cows' milk, you speak to a GP or Health Visitor about it.

Cow's milk and dairy foods do contain some essential nutrients however and if these products are not consumed in the diet then it is very important that these nutrients are sourced from other foods.

## > Cows' milk-free diet

If a child or adult needs to avoid cows' milk, remember that it may be present in many foods, such as:

- Milk
- Milk Powder
- Milk drinks
- All types of cheese
- Butter

- Margarine
- Yogurt
- Cream
- Ice cream

Food labels that list any of the ingredients below also contain some cows' milk or products in them.

- Casein
- Caseinates
- Hydrolysed casein
- Skimmed milk
- Skimmed milk powder
- Milk solids
- Non-fat milk
- Whey
- Whey syrup sweetener
- Milk sugar solids
- Lactose

The following are examples of processed foods which may contain milk:

- Breakfast cereals
- Soups
- Baby foods
- Processed meats, e.g. sausages
- Pasta and pizzas
- Instant mashed potato
- Sauces and gravies
- Baked goods, e.g. rolls
- Pancakes, batters
- Ready made meals
- Puddings and custards
- Cakes, biscuits, crackers
- Chocolate/confectionery
- Crisps

Note: This list includes just some of the foods to be avoided in a milk free diet. Before any changes are made to you or your child's diet,



For more help, contact the Allergy UK helpline:

9am to 5pm,  
Monday to Friday

**01322 619 898**

## Key facts

> Most children outgrow milk allergy by five

> Lactose intolerance is not an allergic condition

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seek advice from a Dietitian.

## > Remember, check the labels first.

If you or your child are allergic to the proteins in cows' milk, neither goat nor sheep milk will be suitable as a replacement. Your body will recognise the milk proteins as being physically similar and react in the same way as to cows' milk. Milk intolerance is also common and many patients who are intolerant but not truly allergic to cows' milk may tolerate goats' milk or sheep's milk better than cows' milk, due to factors other than milk protein. If in doubt, you should check with your medical advisor.

Remember that:

Soya milks available in shops and supermarkets are unsuitable for babies under 12 months.

In children over 12 months, soya milks can be used during weaning, both as a drink and in recipes to replace cows' milk. Soya milks specially developed for younger children are available, but are not recommended in babies under 6 months of age.

## > Cows' milk is an important source of calcium. If my baby must avoid cows' milk, will he get enough calcium?

Soya baby milks are fortified with calcium, and one pint will provide about 60% of the daily requirement for calcium for babies under one year. The balance of the calcium must be obtained from milk free foods at weaning. Occasionally,

calcium supplements may be necessary if a baby is not taking a sufficient amount of soya baby milk and calcium rich solids. If you are concerned about your baby's calcium intake, ask your dietitian or doctor for advice.

## > We prefer a vegetarian diet. Can we give our baby a soy formula instead of a formula based on cows milk?

Yes, although soya formula is mainly given to babies with cows' milk intolerance, it is free from animal products. So, parents who prefer to give their babies a vegetarian diet can use it.

A small number of children will react to soya formula and thus will need to be prescribed a non-milk, non-soya formula for feeding. If you suspect this, please contact your general practitioner or specialist.

If you or your child is milk allergic then specialist advice is required because although some children do "outgrow" their allergy not all will. If one has had a serious reaction, then potentially another could occur. If in doubt contact your specialist or GP. Pure lactose does not contain any milk protein and therefore will not produce any allergic reaction.

## > Lactose Intolerance

This is a relatively uncommon condition in Europeans, although it is present in very many African and Asian populations. This is not an allergic condition but an inability to digest lactose (milk sugar) because the body produces low levels of

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lactase, the enzyme responsible for digesting lactose. It can affect both children and adults, with the common symptoms being diarrhoea, bloating, discomfort. Lactose intolerance may occur temporarily following a bout of gastroenteritis, with diarrhoea being the main symptom. Lactose is present in cow's milk, goat's milk and sheep's milk in similar quantities. As with all intolerances, the only solution is avoidance of the offending food until one can once again tolerate it, which may be weeks, months or longer.

For some people there is a dose related response, that means that you may be able to tolerate milk in tea but a glass of milk would cause symptoms. There is a test available for the diagnosis of lactose intolerance, called a lactose challenge, and for small babies and children is especially advisable. If there is no need to exclude foods from a diet then life is a great deal simpler. Your general practitioner (GP) can refer you to a gastroenterologist, who would give an accurate diagnosis.

In adults, an exclusion diet would probably be adequate and this can be easily attempted at home. If your diet is already restricted or you have a family history of osteoporosis (brittle bones) a dietitian should be consulted. Your GP can refer you to a State Registered Dietitian on the National Health Service. If there is no history of gastroenteritis causing your symptoms, then it may be necessary for milk to be permanently excluded from the diet and provided it is a well-balanced diet this should not have any significant effects on your health. A list of other foods high in calcium has been provided.

If, having excluded dairy products from your diet for 3-4 weeks, with no improvement in your symptoms, it is likely there is some other cause of your symptoms, so you can then reintroduce dairy(milk) products and observe your condition. If you are contemplating a permanent exclusion diet, you should be referred to a dietitian for advice.

Further information on daily calcium requirements and food sources containing calcium can be found on the British Dietetic Association website at <https://www.bda.uk.com/foodfacts/Calcium.pdf>

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