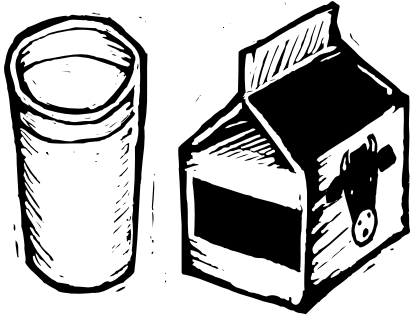


Better Health for Life from  
Lehigh Valley Hospital and Health Network



## Does Milk Do Every Body Good?

Susan Cox of Allentown remembers suffering severe abdominal cramps, nausea, gas and diarrhea. She was tested for gall bladder problems and an ulcer, and drank lots of milk to soothe her stomach.

Then she was diagnosed as lactose intolerant, or allergic to milk and milk products. Cox is one of an estimated 30 to 50 million Americans—including 70 to 80 percent of all African Americans and Asian Americans—who lack the enzyme needed to digest lactose, the predominant sugar of milk and dairy products.

"Most people with lactose intolerance complain of bloating, diarrhea, gas and abdominal cramping about 20 to 30 minutes after drinking milk," says Brian Stello, M.D., Lehigh Valley Hospital and Health Network family physician. "But often it's difficult for them to connect these symptoms to dairy products."

### ■ Tests are inconclusive

Doctors can conduct a blood, breath or stool test, but Stello warns that the tests are not conclusive, and diagnosis is often made by "clinical suspicion." Similar symptoms, he says, can be produced by irritable bowel syndrome (caused by nerves), an allergy (which could also cause hives) or an intestinal disease.

"There are some infectious diseases that can cause lactose intolerance, but usually it is related to enzyme deficiency," Stello says. "Symptoms develop over time, often becoming more pronounced at adolescence."

"When I was diagnosed in my early 20s, I went on an avoidance diet, giving up cream dishes, milk, cheese and ice cream," Cox says. "Today, new pills and non-dairy products make it easier."

Lactose-intolerant people can take over-the-counter Lactaid pills before consuming a dairy product, says Barbara Carlson, clinical dietitian with Lehigh Valley Hospital and Health Network. The pills provide the enzyme needed to digest lactose.

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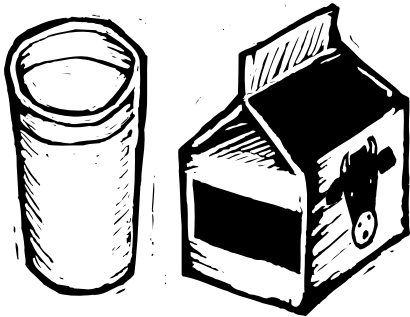
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It's also wise, she says, to get in the habit of reading labels. "Avoid products with the ingredients lactose and whey (milk solids). Substitute lactose-free products, which include calcium-enriched milk and yogurt."

Many milk-sensitive people can tolerate some amount of lactose. "Most people can handle about half a cup of milk, but there are some who can't handle even a tablespoon," Carlson says.

If you prefer non-dairy sources of calcium, leafy green vegetables like broccoli, kale and turnip greens are good sources, Stello says. So are calcium-fortified orange juice, soybeans and tofu.

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