

The Big Picture on Milk Intolerance

By John Upledger, DO, OMM

There is a great deal of talk these days about intolerance and/or allergy to milk and other dairy products.

While it is true that many people experience gastrointestinal (stomach and bowel) problems when ingesting dairy products, totally eliminating them from the diet can potentially adversely affect health.

Dairy products seem to be the only presently known source of a carbohydrate (sugar) known as galactose. This substance is an essential building block for a rather complex family of chemical compounds named gangliosides, which are essential for the development and maintenance of the brain's gray matter. Without them, the nerve cells are unable to intercommunicate with peak efficiency.

Total absence of gangliosides can result in loss of brain function. However, if the deficiency is small, you may just have a little trouble concentrating or focusing on a task. At its most extreme, newborns and children on completely milk-free diets may not be able to develop to their fullest mental capacities.

Between 40 and 60 percent of the population have enzymes in their bodies called epimerases, which have the ability to convert glucose (the most commonly available sugar) to galactose. These people do not have a ganglioside deficiency problem, even if there are no dairy foods in their diet.

Those who are truly milk intolerant and/or allergic may be unfavorably reactive to either of two major components of milk - casein and lactose (milk sugar). Fat, another component of milk that can cause problems for some, is easily avoided with the availability of fat-free milk.

There is a way to determine which dairy component is the cause of an unwanted physical reaction. First, try some casein. If that is the offending agent, one teaspoon of casein in water, juice or food will produce a reaction within 30 minutes. If this occurs, you can most likely get along with lactose.

However, if casein does not produce a reaction, try lactose. One teaspoon of lactose, if it is the cause, will produce unwanted effects within 30 minutes. If the reaction does not occur, you can use lactose as a supplement. I recommend one teaspoon of lactose twice daily in water or juice, on food, or as a sweetener in tea. If lactose causes a reaction, take some galactose. If you can tolerate galactose, you have the option of taking it as a supplement on a daily basis. I recommend about half a teaspoon twice daily in liquids or on food. It is important to keep your brain in shape. I certainly suggest that if you are on a dairy-free diet, you take either lactose or galactose supplements. This is particularly significant for children, whose learning and function could be hampered.

While solutions to dairy-product allergy or intolerance exist, lactose, galactose and casein are a little hard to find. Your local health food store may carry them, as do several national companies. A quick search on the Internet will probably be worth the trip.

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