

LACTOSE INTOLERANCE VS MILK ALLERGY:

A SIMPLE GUIDE TO UNDERSTANDING THE DIFFERENCE

What's the difference

Lactose intolerance and milk allergy are often confused, but they are very different.

Lactose intolerance is a **digestive issue** caused by low lactase, the enzyme that breaks down lactose.

Milk allergy is an **immune reaction** to milk proteins.

Knowing the difference helps guide the right care and reduces unnecessary worry.

Common Symptoms

Lactose Intolerance

- Gas and bloating
- Abdominal cramping
- Diarrhea
- Nausea
- Symptoms usually **occur hours after** consuming dairy

Milk Allergy

- Hives or skin rash
- Vomiting
- Wheezing or breathing difficulty
- Swelling of lips, face, or throat
- Symptoms usually **occur soon after** exposure



Why Lactose Causes Symptoms

When lactose isn't broken down in the small intestine, it moves into the colon.

There, gut bacteria ferment it, producing gas and fluid, that leads to bloating, cramping, and diarrhea.

This process can feel very uncomfortable but it does not damage the gut lining.



Why This Matters

- Lactose intolerance is uncomfortable but not dangerous
- Milk allergy can be serious and requires medical care
- Treating one like the other can cause confusion, unnecessary restriction, or ongoing symptoms

What Actually Helps

Lactose Intolerance

- Reducing (not always eliminating) lactose
- Using lactase supplements
- Managing portions based on tolerance

Milk Allergy

- Strict avoidance of milk proteins
- Guidance from a medical provider
- Allergy evaluation when appropriate

Lactose intolerance and milk allergy may both involve dairy, but they require very different approaches.