

## **Temporary lactose intolerance Patient information leaflet**

This advice leaflet has been produced to support families of children who are thought to be suffering from temporary lactose intolerance resulting from a recent gut illness (gastroenteritis); often referred to as secondary lactose intolerance.

### **Typical symptoms**

Symptoms of lactose intolerance include:

- loose, watery stools (diarrhoea)
- abdominal bloating and pain
- gurgling stomach
- excessive wind
- nappy rash

Lactose intolerance should be suspected in all children who have had a recent bout of gastroenteritis and who continue to suffer from the above symptoms for more than 2 weeks after their illness.

### **What is lactose intolerance?**

Lactose is the natural sugar found in breast milk, cow's milk and the milk of other mammals such as goats and sheep. Lactose intolerance occurs when there is not enough enzyme (lactase) in the gut to break the lactose down, so it stays in the bowel where it can ferment, producing gases, pain and loose stools. Gut illnesses such as gastroenteritis can temporarily damage the gut lining, reducing the amount of lactase produced.

### **How is lactose intolerance diagnosed?**

If a child has any symptoms of lactose intolerance, they may be seen by a health care professional such as a health visitor. The best test with a child is to strictly cut out lactose from the diet for two weeks and see if the symptoms get better. If they do, the diagnosis is confirmed if the symptoms come back on returning to a normal diet

### **How is secondary lactose intolerance normally treated?**

Secondary lactose intolerance, unless it is caused by a long-term condition, is temporary. Usually cutting out lactose-containing milk and dairy products from the diet for 8 weeks will give the gut time to heal. The ability of the gut to produce lactase will build up again and after 8 weeks, the child should be able to drink milk/ formula and eat regular dairy products.

If the child's intolerance is caused by a long-term condition such as coeliac disease or food allergy however, they will need treatment for that. Just cutting out lactose for 8 weeks may make

some of the symptoms better, but it won't cure the underlying condition. It is likely that after 8 weeks the child will be unable to go back to having normal dairy products and milk without the symptoms coming back. If this is the case, the underlying condition needs to be identified and treated.

## What happens next?

### Step 1 – Two week lactose free trial

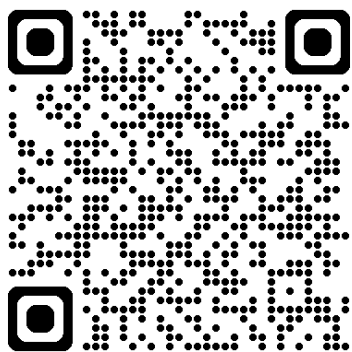
If the health care professional suspects that a child under 1 year of age is suffering from temporary lactose intolerance following a gut illness and if the child is not being breast fed they will advise that the child be changed onto lactose free infant formula. This can be purchased from a supermarket or pharmacy at a similar price to standard infant formula. If you are entitled to Healthy Start vouchers you can use these towards the cost of the formula. If the child is over 1 year of age, cow's milk based Lactofree™ milks of varying fat contents are available to buy. Plant based milks and dairy alternatives such as soya are not recommended during the 2-week trial period, as this can confuse the diagnosis between lactose intolerance and cow's milk allergy.

If the mother is breastfeeding, continue to do so. They do not need to change to a lactose free infant formula, use lactase enzymes or cut out milk or lactose from mother's diet.

If the child is having solids, a low lactose diet should also be followed. This involves avoiding all key sources of lactose i.e fresh, heat treated and powdered cow's milk and other mammalian milks e.g. sheep, goat and dairy products including soft and cottage cheeses, yogurt, fromage frais and ice cream. During the trial, other foods and medicines containing lactose should also be avoided.

Check food labels to make sure the products do not contain **lactose** or any of the other ingredients and remember that manufacturers often change their recipes, so check regularly.

You can also access dietary information via the Allergy UK website:



[Lactose Intolerance | Allergy UK | National Charity](#)