

# Allergies and Dairy

People with a true milk allergy react to dairy proteins, even in small amounts. Eliminating dairy under medical or dietary supervision is usually recommended since symptoms can be severe.

## Food allergy signs and symptoms

Food allergies can develop at any age but are most common in children under five.

Nine foods cause 90% of allergic reactions: egg, cow's milk, peanut, tree nuts, sesame, soy, wheat, fish and shellfish/other seafood. Symptoms of a food allergy appear after exposure to an allergen.

These symptoms can include hives, lip swelling, eye swelling, facial swelling, vomiting, or wheezing.

Anaphylaxis is the most dangerous allergic reaction and can be life-threatening.<sup>1</sup>

## Cow's milk allergy

In Australia and New Zealand, around 2 per cent of infants are allergic to cow's milk and dairy products.

Most children outgrow cow's milk allergy by age five. Ongoing symptoms in adults are rare.<sup>2</sup>

## Diagnosis and diet

A clinical immunology specialist can confirm allergy triggers through skin-prick or blood tests. People with a true milk allergy are usually allergic to the proteins in dairy and will react to even a small amount of these foods. Once an allergy has been diagnosed by a doctor, the offending food or foods should be removed from the diet.

If cow's milk is the allergy identified, avoid all foods that contain:

- Cow's milk;
- Cow's milk products, including cheese, yoghurt, ice-cream, butter, ghee, buttermilk, cream, and cream fraiche; and
- Cow's milk ingredients, such as milk powder, milk solids, casein and whey.

People allergic to cow's milk react to all types of cow's milk, regardless of brand or cow breed. They are also often allergic to other animal milks, such as goat's milk. If long term exclusion is necessary, patients require an alternative source of calcium and protein. Advice from an Accredited Practising Dietitian (APD) is recommended.

## The difference between intolerances and allergies

An allergy is different from an intolerance.

Lactose intolerance occurs due to a lack of lactase, the enzyme that digests the milk sugar lactose. The symptoms can include diarrhoea, vomiting, stomach pain and gas. These symptoms may resemble some of the symptoms of milk allergy.<sup>3</sup> This condition is uncomfortable but not dangerous, and does not cause rashes or anaphylaxis.<sup>4</sup> Small amounts of cow's milk are usually tolerated. Yoghurts and hard cheeses are often tolerated, since they contain less, or easier-to-digest, lactose.<sup>5</sup>

### How long should cow's milk be avoided?

Milk allergy is often outgrown, allowing successful reintroduction under medical supervision. Repeat allergy testing helps determine if reintroduction is possible. Eliminated foods must be reintroduced extremely cautiously and only under strict medical guidance.<sup>6,7</sup>

## What are the consequences of eliminating dairy from the diet?

Dairy is the biggest contributor of calcium in the Australian diet.<sup>8</sup> However, it also provides a unique package of other essential nutrients. These include protein, riboflavin, vitamin B12, vitamin A, potassium, iodine and phosphorus.

Eliminating dairy should be done with an Accredited practicing Dietitian's guidance to ensure nutritional needs are still met. Otherwise, a lack of dairy may lead to low calcium intake, reduced bone density, and higher fracture risk.<sup>9</sup>

Only calcium-enriched legume, bean, or cereal milk products are considered dairy alternatives. These include fortified soy, rice, and oat drinks. To be considered a dairy alternative, fortified alternatives should contain at least 100mg of added calcium per 100mL. Soy and plant-based drinks (except soy follow-on formula) are unsuitable for infants under 12 months. This is because they are nutritionally incomplete, meaning they don't provide all nutrients required for infants to thrive. After 12 months, fortified soy or plant-based drinks can be used with professional guidance. Other sources of protein and vitamin B12 should be included in the diet.<sup>10</sup>

## References

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## Disclaimer

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