DOWN SYNDROME PROGRAM
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Lactose-Free v. Dairy-Free: How to Tell the Difference

While a lactose-free diet and a dairy-free diet may appear similar, they are two different diets, or ways of eating. This handout explains the differences between a lactose-free diet and a dairy-free diet, plus what to look for on packaging when grocery shopping.

WHAT ARE THE DIFFERENCES BETWEEN LACTOSE INTOLERANCE, MILK/DAIRY ALLERGY AND MILK/DAIRY INTOLERANCE?

Lactose intolerant

Lactose is a type of sugar found in milk and milk products, such as cheese, yogurt, ice cream and butter. Our bodies produce an enzyme called **lactase**, which helps us digest lactose properly. In some people, over time, the body stops producing enough lactase. This is normal. As a result, they can no longer digest lactose properly. This causes uncomfortable **gastrointestinal** (stomach and intestine) symptoms, including gas, bloating, cramps, diarrhea and nausea.

Milk/dairy allergy

A **milk/dairy allergy** is the most common food allergy in infants and young children. A person with a milk allergy is often allergic to one of two proteins found in milk. The two proteins are called **casein** and **whey**. In people who have a milk/dairy allergy, the immune system overreacts to these specific proteins. This can cause serious symptoms like **wheezing** (a whistling sound when breathing in) and trouble breathing. People with a milk/dairy allergy should not consume any foods that contain milk/dairy.

Milk/dairy intolerant

It is also possible to have gastrointestinal symptoms (like reflux and constipation)after consuming milk products and not be classified as lactose intolerant. Choosing lactose-free options made from milk eliminates lactose but not milk proteins. Choosing plant-based or vegan “milk” and yogurt eliminates lactose and the two milk proteins casein and whey.

DO LACTOSE-FREE OR VEGAN PRODUCTS CONTAIN DAIRY?

Product	Lactose-free	Dairy-free
• 100% lactose-free yogurt • Lactaid® products • Lactose-free cheese	Yes	No
• Plant-based milk alternatives • Dairy-free yogurt • Vegan cheese*	Yes	Yes

***Vegan cheeses are free of any animal-sourced ingredients, making them dairy, egg and meat-free.**

Did you know…?

Eggs are still a part of a dairy-free diet. Even though they are found in the dairy section of the grocery store, eggs do not contain milk sugar and milk proteins. Eggs are safe to eat in a milk-free diet.

HOW TO FIND DAIRY-FREE FOODS IN THE GROCERY STORE

How do I know if a food has milk or dairy in it?

The **nutrition facts label** will say one of the two following phrases:

- Contains milk
- The word **milk** will be in parenthesis next to an ingredient that comes from or is made from milk. For example, an ingredient list may say **cream (milk).**



The following ingredients can also mean that a product contains milk:

- Butter, butter fat, butter milk
- Cream cheese
- Cheese (variety of types)
- **Ghee** (Butter that has the milk solids, or casein and whey, removed. Ghee does not contain lactose, but it does contain dairy.)
- Half-and-half

What are some dairy-free substitutes for foods that contain dairy?

Dairy-free (also called non-dairy) substitutes are usually not an exact match from a nutrition perspective. When picking out one of these substitutes while grocery shopping, look for ones that say fortified or enriched and consider how much protein they contain. Below is a list of dairy-free substitutes for many popular dairy foods:

- **Milk:** almond, coconut, hemp, soy, rice, flaxseed, pea, oat
- **Yogurt:** coconut, rice, almond, soy, oat, cashew
- **Cheese:** pea (Daiya ®), coconut (Good Planet ®, Violife ®)
- **Ice cream**: almond-based, coconut-based, soy-based or oat-based (for example: SILK®, So Delicious® or Oatly®)
- **Butter:** Earth Balance® spreads, coconut (Violife ®), cashew (Forager Project®)
- **Cream cheese:** soy (Tofutti®), almond (Kite Hill®), coconut (Violife ®)
- **Chocolate:** Enjoy Life® (milk-free, nut-free), Hu (milk-free)

A note about oat milk…

Some brands of oat milk are not **certified gluten free**. If you have celiac disease, ask your doctor before using oat milk.

What are some dairy-free snack ideas?

Below are some dairy-free snack ideas that you could try in your home!

- Raw veggies with hummus (carrots, celery, cucumbers)
- Apple or banana slices with nut butter (peanut, almond, cashew, mixed nut)
- Smoothies made with an alternative milk
- Trail mix with dried fruit, as a chocolate alternative
- Butter-free popcorn (Try with a drizzle of olive oil, garlic, nutritional yeast or chipotle chili powder!)

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For more information please call

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