

0:00 Milk allergy and lactose intolerance - while they share dairy in common, milk allergy and lactose intolerance are two completely separate health conditions, and they affect the people who live with them in very different ways.

0:16 Hi, I'm Heather Brooker here to answer your most pressing questions from the often confusing world of food. Today we're talking about two very different ways milk can make you sick: milk allergy versus lactose intolerance. Let's get into it. This is food for thought.

0:33 [Music]

0:39 [Applause]

0:41 [Music]

0:43 While we're going to focus on milk allergies and lactose intolerance specifically, the differences between them are just like the differences between any allergy and intolerance; plainly different systems of the body are involved.

0:56 A food allergy is the immune system's overreaction to a specific protein. If your body encounters the protein you're allergic to, an allergic reaction can be triggered. These reactions can be mild or severe, from just a rash or hives all the way to life-threatening anaphylaxis.

1:16 Food intolerances on the other hand have nothing to do with the immune system and are not life-threatening. If you are lactose intolerant you are missing the enzyme lactase which works to break down lactose a sugar found in milk and dairy products. Because of this missing enzyme your digestive system can't process these foods. As a result, ingesting food containing lactose can cause nausea, cramps, gas bloating, and diarrhea. While these symptoms can be incredibly unpleasant, none are life-threatening

1:51 Now where things could get confusing and why you need to always check your labels are with dairy products marked lactose free. They can still have milk proteins that trigger an allergic reaction and there are some cutting edge vegan dairy products on the market that while being fully plant-based have the same milk allergy-triggering proteins as the stuff from cows

2:15 Luckily, those products also must contain the allergen warning on the label so again, always check your labels since it's easy to confuse a milk allergy and lactose intolerance. It's important to teach children the difference. If your child is allergic to milk, they need to understand that they can't just give in and try some ice cream like their lactose-intolerant friend. The consequences for an allergic child can be much more serious than an uncomfortable and potentially embarrassing trip to the bathroom. It's simply not worth the risk

2:50 Once it's explained, the difference between milk allergy and lactose intolerance isn't that complicated. The most important thing is to determine which health condition you or your child is facing and to approach these dairy products accordingly

3:07 As always, make sure to sign up for alerts on foodallergy.org to keep up with the latest. You can manage your milk allergy or lactose intolerance and explain it to others, and we're here to help