

## How does lactose intolerance affect my health?

In addition to having unpleasant symptoms, you may have trouble getting enough nutrients, such as **calcium** and vitamin D. Milk and milk products are sources of calcium. Calcium is a mineral the body needs for strong bones and teeth. If you do not get enough calcium, over time your bones may become less dense and break easily.

## How does my doctor know if I have lactose intolerance?

Your doctor will try to find out if you have lactose intolerance with the following:

- **Medical, family, and diet history.** Your doctor will ask you questions about your medical and family history, your diet, and your symptoms.
- **Physical exam.** A physical exam may help your doctor find out if you have lactose intolerance or another problem. During a physical exam, your doctor usually
  - checks for bloating in your belly
  - uses a stethoscope to listen to sounds within your belly
  - taps on your belly to check for tenderness or pain

After taking a history and completing a physical exam, your doctor may ask you to stop having milk and milk products to see if your symptoms go away. If your symptoms do not go away, your doctor might order the following tests:

- **Hydrogen breath test.** This test checks the amount of a gas called hydrogen in your breath. Normally, a person's breath only has a small amount of hydrogen after you eat lactose and the body breaks it down. Lactose that the body does not break down causes high amounts of hydrogen in the breath. For this test, you have a drink with a known amount of lactose. A doctor asks you to breathe into a balloon-type container that measures hydrogen. A doctor usually performs this test at a hospital, on an outpatient basis. Smoking and some foods and medicines may affect the results. Your doctor will tell you what foods and medicines you need to avoid before the test.

- **Stool acidity test.** If your body does not break down lactose, the lactose creates acid. The stool acidity test measures the amount of acid in the stool from a bowel movement. Doctors sometimes use this test for infants and young children. The doctor will give you a container to take home for catching and storing your child's stool. You will need to return the sample to the doctor, and the doctor will send it to a lab for testing.

