

DAIRY-FREE DIET

Implementing Casein-Free/Dairy-Free Diet

Courtesy of Christiane Gram

What is Casein

Casein is a protein found in dairy products, or dairy-based products, such as milk, yogurt, protein shakes, infant formulas and cheeses. In addition, certain components of dairy have been isolated and used as filler or binding agents in many non-dairy foods, some medications and even personal care products.

Why is Casein a problem

Casein, and dairy in general, can be problematic for many individuals for a variety of reasons. There may be a genetic predisposition of dairy intolerance, the inability to produce specific enzymes necessary to break down those proteins, food allergies or intolerances, gastro-intestinal distress, imbalance in gut flora, inflammation and more. The process of pasteurization and modern dairy farming techniques may contribute to dairy intolerances. The act of heating products (pasteurization) to kill bacteria also destroys the enzymes that help break down dairy in the digestive tract. Current methods of “massagriculture” including the shift in the bovine diet from grasses to chemically-laden, genetically modified, soy-based feeds may contribute to intolerances.

What are Opioid Peptides

Opioid peptides are short chains of partially digested amino acids found in certain protein sources (such as dairy) that mimic the effect of opiate drugs on the brain. These partially digested milk proteins, called caseomorphin, are very similar in structure to morphine and are highly addictive, making it difficult for many people to break this “addictive” habit.

Opioid peptides can come from three sources:

1. Produced by the body itself, for example, endorphins are the body’s natural painkillers,
2. They can be absorbed from partially digested food, or
3. Created by certain types of microbes.

Some people actually experience a “high” when digesting dairy products and may also experience withdrawal side effects when trying to reduce or eliminate dairy, similar to that of addicts trying to kick drug habits. In order to minimize the withdrawal side effects, it is suggested that this lifestyle modification be implemented over a period of 2-4 weeks, with the goal of being completely dairy-free at the end of that period. While not a replacement for elimination of this food, digestive enzymes that include the DPP-IV enzyme may help reduce the effects of withdrawal and assist with digestion.

See the Naturopaths at Go Vita Loganholme or check out the Realize Health website for more information.

What is the difference between Lactose Intolerance & Casein

Lactose, also a component of milk, is a sugar or glucose instead of protein. Lactose intolerance is the inability to digest lactose sugar and occurs because the body lacks the specific enzyme lactase that helps digest lactose. It typically causes abdominal bloating, diarrhea, and excessive gas after eating dairy products. If these symptoms persist despite the addition of this enzyme, a complete elimination of dairy may be warranted.

Before you start

Soy often breaks down into components similar to casein and may not be the best alternate source of protein. As one of the most common allergens, soy is very difficult for some people to digest, mimics estrogens (hormones) in the body and may be connected with a wide variety of health issues. It may be best to avoid soy where possible, particularly in high doses. Small amounts of fermented soy may be acceptable depending on sensitivity.

It is important to educate yourself and research foods that contain casein (and/or dairy.) The internet is a great source of information, but be aware that conflicting interests may not provide accurate information.

Please note that dairy-free always means casein-free but not necessarily the reverse as other components of dairy may still be present in casein-free foods, such as lactose, milk fat etc. Also, lactose-free does not mean casein-free. If a product does not specifically say dairy-free or casein-free I would always recommend that you contact the manufacturer to verify the ingredients.

Allergies

Food allergies and intolerances are very common in our society and it is recommended to do allergy testing to ensure that the substitutions that are being recommended are not on your allergy list. There are two types of allergies. The first type is a true allergy that causes an immediate reaction typically within 30 minutes of ingestion (runny nose, headache, digestive issues, anaphylaxis, hives, red ears, etc.). This type of reaction is called IgE.

Another type of allergy or intolerance is the IgG which is typically a delayed reaction of up to four days. This is very difficult to diagnose as you may be reacting to foods that were eaten several days ago and is therefore the most critical allergy test to undergo.

It is recommended to have IgE and IgG food allergy testing done through a reputable lab (see your healthcare practitioner for advice on this). These tests require a blood draw (the IgG now also comes in a finger prick or blood spot version) and must be ordered by a licensed physician.

The most common food allergens include: dairy, wheat, soy, shellfish, fish, chocolate, peanuts, tree nuts and eggs.

Replacing Dairy with Non-Dairy Alternatives

Milk – use dairy-free substitutes, provided labels state dairy-free: coconut milk, hemp milk, almond milk, rice milk (only ones made on Australian rice), potato milk, oat milk, etc.

Protein Shakes – Use alternative protein sources for shakes including yellow pea, hemp, rice (only Australian fermented brown rice), vegetable, or egg (albumin) protein. Sometimes mixing a combination of protein sources gives a better taste and texture. Watch for allergic reactions.

Yogurt – Coconut milk yogurt - you can either make your own using a culture starter (google the recipe) or find CoYo brand available at health food stores.

Ice Cream – There are many non-dairy frozen desserts now on the market. CoYo is one brand with quite a few varieties of Coconut-based ice-creams. Read labels carefully. Many ice cream parlors offer sorbets (fruit based ice creams). Be sure to tell them about your dairy allergy and ask them to use sterilized utensils.

Chocolate – Dairy-free chocolate is available (read ingredient list). Milk chocolate is not acceptable but many dark chocolates are. Cocoa butter is acceptable as it is made from the cocoa bean. Raw cacao nibs can be used for dairy-free chocolate chips and are available at most health food stores.

Helpful Tips

Read all food ingredient labels and when in doubt, contact the manufacturer. Products may still have hidden ingredients if the manufacturer purchases pre-made ingredients such as flavorings that are added, or if the item added is considered insignificant.

When going out to a restaurant, it's easier to tell wait-staff upfront about any allergies. Don't bother explaining that casein is a component of dairy – they won't understand! Ask to speak to the manager and have them oversee your order. Many restaurants now have food allergy guides and special menus for those with allergies.

Contact the Feingold Association for additional information on hidden ingredients, a non-profit organization dedicated to helping individuals with special food requirements. www.feingold.org.

French Fries: Hidden Source of Gluten & Casein

McDonald's fries contain allergens: New ingredients labels include wheat and dairy.

McDonald's and many fast food restaurants coat their fries with dairy. Review ingredient lists and verify before consumption. See <http://www.msnbc.msn.com/id/11326937/> (excerpt below).

And another thing about McDonald's fries: They're not gluten-free. Not long after disclosing that its french fries contain more trans-fat than thought, McDonald's Corp. said Monday that wheat and dairy ingredients are used to flavor the popular menu item — an acknowledgment it had not previously made. The presence of those substances can cause allergic or other medical reactions in food-sensitive consumers. McDonald's had said until recently that its fries were free of gluten and milk or wheat allergens and safe to eat for those with dietary issues related to the consumption of dairy items. But the fast-food company quietly added "Contains wheat and milk ingredients" this month to the french fries listing on its web site.

This guide has been written by Christiane Gram for educational purposes only to help those who are trying to embark on a casein-free (CF) or dairy-free diet. This is not meant to convince anyone of the virtues of this diet, but rather for those who are following the advice of their healthcare practitioner who might have determined that this could be limiting them in achieving their health-potential.