



# Lactose Intolerance and Health Disparities among African Americans and Hispanic Americans

**Did you know lactose intolerance is one of the primary reasons for dairy avoidance?**

The fact is dairy can be enjoyed by those with lactose intolerance. Recently, the National Medical Association (NMA) and the National Hispanic Medical Association (NHMA), published a consensus statement summarizing the most current information about lactose intolerance and health.

## Good News for Dairy Lovers

The consensus statement aligns with the Dietary Guidelines for Americans and states that:

- Dairy's Nutrients are Essential**  
 Dairy's nutrients are essential for bone growth and maintenance. Milk and milk product intake is also associated with better diet quality and has been associated with the reduced risk of chronic diseases or conditions including hypertension, cardiovascular disease, metabolic syndrome, type 2 diabetes and osteoporosis.
- Dairy Provides Essential Nutrients**  
 Low-fat and fat-free milk provides 3 of the 4 essential nutrients that Americans are not meeting current recommendations for.
- It's Not Just About the Calcium**  
 While other foods provide some of dairy's nutrients, the nutrients in milk are not easily replaced by calcium alternatives. Two studies have shown cow's milk is better liked compared to soy beverage options.  
[Food Science Study](#) / [Sensory Study](#)

**Lactose intolerance is often a misunderstood condition.**

**So what is it exactly?**

People who are lactose intolerant don't have enough lactase, the enzyme that breaks down lactose (a sugar naturally found in milk).

Lactose intolerance refers to the gastrointestinal disturbances that may occur following the consumption of more lactose, a carbohydrate in milk and milk products, than the body is able to digest. Left undigested, lactose is then fermented by "healthy" bacteria in the intestinal tract. This fermentation produces uncomfortable symptoms such as gas, abdominal pain or bloating.



**Here are some simple ways to include dairy if you have lactose intolerance:**

- Try lactase enzyme pills**  
 These help digest the lactose in dairy when taken with the first exposure to dairy.
- Buy natural cheeses**  
 Natural cheeses, like Mozzarella, Swiss, Cheddar, Monterey Jack, and Colby cheese contain minimal amounts of lactose and may be better tolerated.
- Buy lactose-free dairy products**  
 These contain the same nutrients as cow's milk products.
- Individualize your approach**  
 Just as the amounts of lactose varies in every dairy product, symptoms vary for every person who has lactose intolerance.  
 Try eating dairy in small amounts and increase slowly over time to tolerance.
- Take dairy with meals**  
 Mix milk, yogurt or cheese with other foods to help slow digestion and allow the body more time to digest lactose.
- Eat yogurt**  
 Yogurt that contains live and active cultures can help break down and digest lactose.



**REFERENCE:**  
Bailey RK, Fileti CP, Keith J, Tropez-Sims S, Price W, Allison-Ottey SD. Lactose intolerance and health disparities among African Americans and Hispanic Americans: an updated consensus statement. *J Natl Med Assoc.* 2013;105:112-127.