Press Release

Symptoms of lactose intolerance may not be very apparent, says IMA

- Milk is not the only source of calcium
- This condition does not have a cure but can be managed with dietary changes

New Delhi, 15 July 2017: As per statistics, about 70% of Indians are lactose intolerant with the incidence higher in southern Indian than in the North. Lactose intolerance is one of the most common forms of food intolerance. Those who consciously or unconsciously avoid milk due to this disorder do not realize that they need a supplement to replenish calcium levels in their body. According to IMA, a deficiency of calcium can lead to problems at a later age and therefore, one should include other sources of calcium in one’s diet.

Lactose intolerance is caused when one cannot digest the high amount of sugar present in milk, called lactose. This is because they don’t have enough secretions of lactase, an enzyme that helps break down this sugar. Such people can, therefore, not digest milk or milk products.

Speaking about this, Padma Shri Awardee Dr K K Aggarwal, National President Indian Medical Association (IMA) and President Heart Care Foundation of India (HCFI) and Dr RN Tandon – Honorary Secretary General IMA in a joint statement, said, "The cells lining the small intestine produce an enzyme called lactase which attaches to lactose molecules in the food that we eat and breaks them into two simple sugars: glucose and galactose. These can be absorbed into the bloodstream. A reduction in this enzyme makes most of the lactose go unprocessed into the colon, where normal intestinal bacteria interact with it causing gas, bloating, and diarrhea. Constantly deluging the colon by fermenting lactose can leave the digestive system permanently weakened. It can also lead to an overgrowth of harmful bacteria and weaken immunity. Babies can produce enough lactase in the digestive systems to digest milk. With age, the enzyme in the body starts to decrease and so does the ability to break down lactose."

The very first symptom of lactose intolerance is the Irritable Bowel Syndrome (IBS) which causes belly discomfort and change in the bowel habits overtime. Other symptoms include diarrhea, constipation, and cramps usually in the lower half of the belly.

Adding further, Dr Aggarwal, said, "The first and foremost side effect in a lactose intolerant person is calcium and Vitamin D deficiency. However, due to the fact that the body is unable to break lactose to provide nutrients even in the normal state ensures that this side effect does not make
much difference. Look for alternative sources of calcium and Vitamin D to replenish the requirements. Some examples include almond and soy milk, and vegetables like spinach and broccoli."

While there is no cure for lactose intolerance, following these tips can make it easier for you.

- Choosing smaller dairy servings. This will make it less likely for you to get gastrointestinal problems.
- Drinking milk with other foods can help slow down the digestive process and therefore lessen the symptoms too.
- Not all dairy products have the same amount of lactose. Try cultured milk products such as yogurt which carry enzymes that can help break down lactose.
- Try opting for lactose-free products. These are available widely today. Also, watch out for hidden lactose in cereals, instant soups, salad dressings, nondairy creamers, processed meats and baking mixes.
- Take lactase enzyme tablets or drops in consultation with your doctor.

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About IMA: Indian Medical Association is the only representative, national voluntary organization of Doctors of Modern Scientific System of Medicine, which looks after the interest of doctors as well as the well being of the community at large. It has its Headquarter in Delhi and State / Terr. Branches in 30 States and Union Territories. It has over 2, 60,000 doctors as its members through more than 1765 active local branches spread across the country.

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