

New Study Finds Americans Self-Diagnosing Lactose Intolerance

(NAPSA)—Medical self-diagnosis is risky business, yet it's all too common. Recent research reveals that the majority of Americans claiming to be lactose intolerant have not been diagnosed by a doctor, or any other medical professional. In a study of 3,000 people nationwide, 62 percent of respondents said they "self-diagnosed" the condition.

The findings suggest that people may be putting their health at risk by ignoring more serious underlying medical conditions and eliminating essential nutrients from their diet.

"Lactose intolerance—which can cause bloating, stomach cramps, gas and diarrhea—can be uncomfortable for those who suffer from it," says Susan Bowerman, Nutritionist, UCLA Center for Human Nutrition. "But these are also the same symptoms of more serious diseases like colon cancer. Anyone suffering in this way should see a doctor."

According to the nationwide study, 80 percent of people who think they're lactose intolerant either cut back or stop drinking milk altogether.

"Lactose intolerance is becoming the 'Disease du Jour,'" says Jeff Manning, California Milk Processor Board executive director. "People talk with a friend and conclude they're lactose intolerant without seeking medical advice."

In California, the birthplace of trends, more than 15 percent of people believe they are lactose intolerant and many are staying

Got Diagnosed?

Study finds nearly two out of every three Americans claiming **Lactose Intolerance** have 'self-diagnosed' their condition.

62% say NO

Source: CMPB Study: "Evaluation of Lactose Intolerance in the Market" - 2002

away from milk whether they need to or not.

"Even if you've been diagnosed with lactose intolerance, you can still drink milk with meals or in your latte, for example," says Bowerman. In fact, a recent clinical study (as reported by the *New England Journal of Medicine*) found that drinking small amounts of milk—or exposing the body to a little lactose daily—actually prevented symptoms.

"Giving up milk can set up serious problems down the road for you and your children," warns Bowerman. "Milk contains calcium and eight other essential nutrients which fuel our bodies and bones. Going without these nutrients can slow growth rates and create thin fragile bones—a condition called osteoporosis. It's better to switch to non-lactose milk than dropping it from your diet entirely."

Before you self-diagnose your digestive problems, see a health-care professional. Experts warn that it could be something else entirely. The key is not to pretend you're a doctor.