

# Regulation of the Lactase Gene



## About This Worksheet

This worksheet complements the Click and Learn "Regulation of the Lactase Gene" developed in conjunction with the 2011 HHMI Holiday Lectures on Science "Bones, Stones, and Genes: The Origin of Modern Humans."

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## Key Concepts

- Eukaryotic gene expression is regulated at the levels of transcription, RNA processing, translation, and post-translation.
- Proteins called transcription factors bind to DNA and control transcription. Different types of transcription factors can increase or decrease transcription.
- Mutations in DNA regions that control gene expression can alter the way genes are expressed.
- Infants have high lactase levels so that they can digest their mothers' milk, but lactase gene expression is turned off after weaning.
- Lactase persistence is the trait that allows adults to continue to digest milk. It results from a mutation in an enhancer region of the lactase gene.

## Instructions

1. Go to [BioInteractive.org](http://BioInteractive.org).
2. In the menu bar under the masthead, mouse over Topics → Evolution → Interactive.
3. Scroll down the page and click on "Regulation of the Lactase Gene."
4. Proceed through the slides, watch the embedded video clips, and answer the following questions in the space provided.

## Questions

1. What is the difference between lactose tolerance and lactose intolerance? Be specific.

The main difference between lactose tolerance and lactose intolerance is the ability to digest lactose, a carbohydrate commonly found on dairy products, to its simpler units – glucose and galactose through the enzyme lactase. Basically, a person is considered lactose intolerant if he/she does not have/ have reduced lactase in his/her small intestine.

2. Why is lactose tolerance also called lactase persistence?

Lactase is a normal enzyme found in the human body most especially during its infant to childhood stages. As we age, the ability to produce the enzyme reduces and in some cases it completely stops. This makes a person lactose intolerant. Lactose tolerance is also called lactase persistence because these people did not stop from producing lactase even post childhood stage. They have persistently produced this enzyme which allow the person to easily digest dairy products with ease.

3. In which cells or tissues is lactase produced and what is its role?

Lactase is primarily produced in the cells of the walls of the small intestine. The small intestine functions for the absorption of nutrients from digested food as well as further digestion of food. To be more specific, proteins, fats, and carbohydrates are digested here with the help of many gastric juices. Hence, lactase is one of the carbohydrates that is digested in the small intestine with the help of lactase.

4. What normally happens to the levels of lactase produced throughout a person's lifetime?

LCT gene, the gene responsible for the translation of lactase, is very active during infant to childhood stage. As a person ages, the LCT gene becomes inactive thus greatly affecting the production of lactase. In general, as a person gets older, the more the person becomes lactose intolerant.

# Regulation Of The Lactase Gene Worksheet Answers

**Dennis Savaiano**



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