

# Myths and Facts of Milk and Milk Products for Common Gastrointestinal Diseases in Children

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## ABSTRACT

India is a very rich country in terms of ancient cultural practices. Modifying dietary practices and using some plant-based products for the treatment of various diseases are described in ancient Indian books. Also, there is huge diversity in dietary and nutritional practices across the nation from north to south and east to west. Various dietary products are being used orally or locally at the sites in affected areas.

Various dietary remedies are being used in childhood illness by parents and grandparents of children for symptomatic relief and for curing the illness. Many of these dietary practices are also being practiced by pediatricians and general physicians. Many of these dietary practices are scientifically proven; however, some of the unscientific dietary practices are still practiced by some pediatricians and general physicians.

In this mini-review article, we will discuss myths and facts about milk and milk products used for gastrointestinal and liver illness in children.

**Keywords:** Milk, Milk products, Myths and facts.

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## MYTHS AND FACTS REGARDING MILK AND MILK PRODUCTS

Yogurt is a nutritional food that contains probiotics. It promotes digestive health.

- Myth: Yogurt with sugar alleviates abdominal distension.
- Fact: Yogurt with sugar may worsen abdominal distension. Adding sugar to yogurt may contribute to gas and bloating. It is best to consume plain yogurt.
- Myth: Consuming buttermilk with roasted cumin seeds can cure blood in stool.
- Fact: It is a popular home remedy for digestive issues in Indian households. However, it is not a guaranteed cure for blood in the stool. Blood in the stool can be due to various conditions and needs a pediatric gastroenterologist's opinion and management.
- Myth: Feeding children curd/yogurt can stop vomiting and aid digestion.
- Fact: It is a well-known soothing food for the stomach in Indian households. It may be helpful in certain cases of vomiting. But it is not a guaranteed remedy for vomiting. In a few cases, vomiting may worsen, such as lactose intolerance cow's milk allergy (CMA).
- Myth: Consuming buttermilk or yogurt can help alleviate pain in the abdomen in children.
- Fact: This is generally true. It contains probiotics, which can aid digestion and promote a healthy gut. They can help with some abdominal discomfort/pain. However, if the pain persists or worsens, it is essential to consult a specialist clinician.
- Myth: Consuming hot milk with turmeric can alleviate abdominal pain in children.
- Fact: This is a common belief in Indian households. Turmeric has anti-inflammatory properties, but its role in pain in the abdomen has not been scientifically proven.

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- Myth: Consuming a small amount of milk or allergenic food can help build tolerance in children with allergies.
- Fact: This is a dangerous myth. The fact is that it can trigger severe allergic reactions, including anaphylaxis. It is important to avoid all allergens strictly and consult a pediatrician/pediatric gastroenterologist.
- Myth: Consuming goat milk is a safe alternative for children with CMA.
- Fact: This is a myth. The fact is that goat milk is not a safe alternative for cow milk allergy. Cross allergens are seen in goat milk and cow's milk. So they can still trigger allergic reactions. It is crucial to avoid all milk and milk products in children with CMA.
- Myth: Avoiding all dairy products is necessary when a child has diarrhea.
- Fact: Only some children temporarily develop lactose intolerance during an episode of diarrhea; it is not necessary to completely avoid all dairy products. Many children can tolerate dairy products.
- Myth: Drinking more milk can help relieve constipation in children.

**Table 1:** Myths and facts about milk and milk products in children

| Serial number | Myth   | Fact   |
|---------------|--|--|
| 1             | Sugar and yogurt alleviate abdominal distension  | No role; rather, it may worsen abdominal distension by contributing to gas and bloating  |
| 2             | Consuming buttermilk with roasted cumin seeds cures blood in stool                         | No such evidence. It is a myth   |
| 3             | Curd/yogurt stops vomiting and aids in digestion   | It may have some role. However, symptoms may worsen in some cases  |
| 4             | Consuming buttermilk/yogurt can help alleviate pain in the abdomen                         | This is generally true for mild pain in some cases. However, severe or persistent pain must be immediately seen by a specialist consultant           |
| 5             | Hot milk with turmeric may alleviate abdominal distension                                  | No proven role   |
| 6             | Consuming small amounts of milk/allergenic food helps in building tolerance to allergies   | This is a dangerous myth. It can trigger severe allergic reactions, including anaphylaxis  |
| 7             | Goat milk is a safe alternative for CMA  | Goat milk is not safe in CMA. The majority of cross allergens are seen in goat milk and cow milk, which can cause allergic reactions and anaphylaxis |
| 8             | All dairy products to be avoided in diarrhea   | Most children do not require restriction. Only some children with lactose intolerance may require temporary restriction of dairy products            |
| 9             | Drinking more milk helps with constipation   | Drinking more milk not only risks the child for malnutrition, but it may also aggravate constipation   |
| 10            | Early introduction of solid food can prevent the development of food allergies in children | This is a myth. No role in the timing of the introduction of solid food with food allergy prevention   |

- Fact: While breast milk is the exclusive source of all nutrients for a baby, after 6 months, it is insufficient to meet the required nutrients. Giving more milk not only deprives the infant of taking all other nutritious food but also risks the child for malnutrition; it may also aggravate constipation.
- Myth: Early introduction of solid foods can prevent the development of food allergies in children.
- Fact: This is a myth. The timing of the introduction of solid food in infants does not have a significant impact on preventing food allergies (Table 1).

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