

February 14, 1969

Dr. M. F. Brink
Director of Nutrition Research
National Dairy Council
111 North Canal Street
Chicago, Illinois 60606

Dear Dr. Brink:

Thank you for your letter of February 7. I am enclosing some additional material that reflects in published form the thrust of my remarks about lactose intolerance.

I think that the main issue, and it is one that should be cleared up, is some misunderstanding about what is meant by lactose intolerance. The tolerance test is in fact a technique to determine whether lactose is hydrolyzed in the gut, as reflected in the appearance of blood sugar after a test meal. The term "lactose tolerance test" is, of course, borrowed from the "glucose tolerance test" used in the diagnosis of diabetes.

I hope I have been careful, as I think I was at San Francisco, to stress that the lactase deficiency of non-Caucasians is limited to adults, and that alactasia in infants is a very rare disease in any population. I am distressed that no reliable genetic studies have appeared so far about the genetic etiology of adult alactasia. The racial differences are credible, but for my own part I would still like to see firmer evidence that they have a simple genetic basis. There are very few other traits which would so consistently separate different races and even different tribes, apart from superficial characteristics of skin color, etc.

I must disagree with you that adult alactasia can be ignored in planning programs for the distribution of milk solids. The clinical significance of the administration of lactose to individuals with alactasia is certainly not very well understood, and there appears to be some anecdotal evidence that they at least find milk distasteful. However, I certainly agree that these facts must be kept in proper perspective and accurately understood as having little bearing on infant nutrition.

However, I feel that even this point must be investigated much more carefully; if adult alactasia can have escaped our notice for so long in diverse racial groups, we have to be less complacent about unverified generalizations concerning children, too. However, insofar as most such children thrive on mother's milk, one can draw some reasonable common sense conclusions already.

Sincerely yours,

Joshua Lederberg